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THE PROGRESS OF ENGLISH LITERATURE

BY
H. S. KERMODE, M.A.

LECTURER IN EDUCATION
IN THE UNIVERSITY OF LIVERPOOL



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AUTHOR'S NOTE

THE author's aim in preparing this book has been to show very simply the development of English literature from its beginnings to the end of the nineteenth century. The history of a nation's literature is the history of its mind and of achievements greater than territorial conquests, and is therefore worthy of study; but it cannot take the place of the study of literature itself and can at best serve only as an introduction to it.

If this book sends its readers to the authors mentioned in its pages it has fulfilled its purpose. Perhaps it may also furnish a companion to books of selections from English literature by supplying something of the history of change and continuity which is essential to the understanding of Literature, without which the study of selected passages is the study of fragments.

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ERRATA IN TEXT. Page 119, l. 12: for *Laci* read *Laici*.
Page 223, l. 23: for *Mermaid* read *Merman*.

THE PROGRESS OF ENGLISH LITERATURE

CHAPTER I. ANGLO-SAXON LITERATURE.

I.

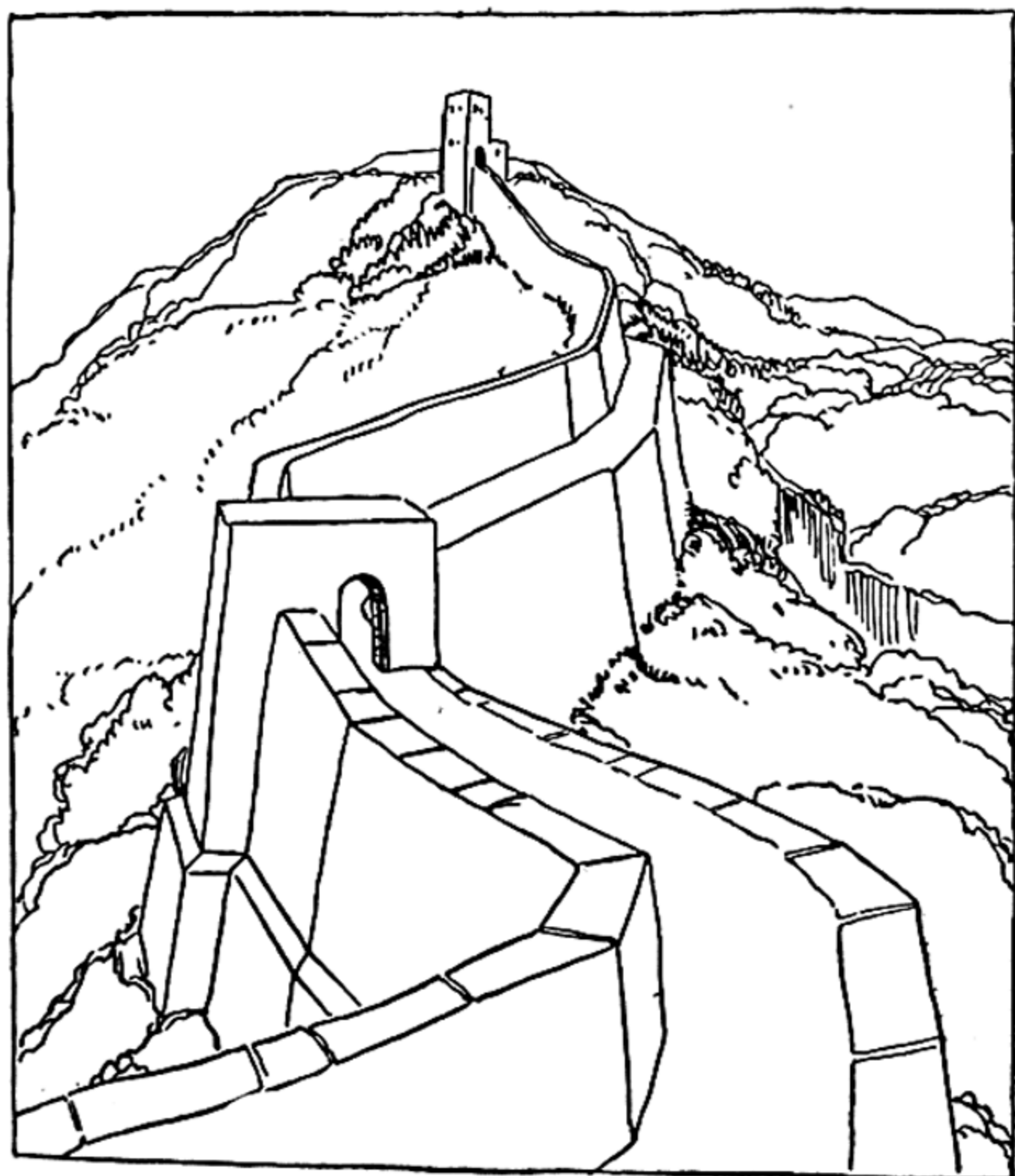
FOR more than 300 years England was part of the great Roman Empire, and received from the Romans who had conquered her, the gifts which Rome gave to those lands that had accepted her rule. These gifts were peace and order, good laws, and certain standards of behaviour which we sometimes call civilization. The Romans, before they conquered Britain, had had long struggles with themselves and with their enemies to make a civilization for themselves, and they were constantly adding new ideas and making their civilization stronger and wider. Wherever they went as soldiers, they carried their civilization with them, and when they had conquered a new land some of them received a part of it, and settled down to farm it, in the midst of the older inhabitants. Very often these Roman soldiers married native women and brought up their children in the Roman way. They were very proud of the great capital of the Empire—Rome—with its magnificent buildings and splendid arches, and all the beautiful and luxurious things that made life so delightful to the dwellers in the capital; and when they were far away in the cold northern countries, they tried to console themselves by making

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their new homes as like Rome as possible. So when they had made sure of Britain by building forts and long, straight roads where their legions could march abreast, they turned to the arts of peace and founded towns which often grew up outside the forts, and they built beautiful villas and great baths which may still be seen to-day.

The people amongst whom they settled in Britain were called Celts, and they were of the same family as their kindred, who lived in the country we now call France. They were a warlike race, but war was not their only interest. They had a civilization of their own and, although it could not be compared with that of the Romans, it showed that they were quick-witted and eager to learn new things. They learnt what the Romans had to teach them, followed their way of life, wore their dress and spoke their language.

✓ The Romans possessed a great literature. They had poems, plays, histories in prose and verse, and meditations on life and death, love and friendship and the dealings of the gods with men. Not every Roman soldier, who spent his days in Britain during these four hundred years, would take any interest in such things, but there must certainly have been many, especially among their officers, who loved them. From such as these the Celts would learn, and it is interesting to think that Virgil's great poem may have been read in Britain more than sixteen hundred years ago, just as it is still read at the present day. These Celts had stories of their own which told of the lives of their own heroes, but of these not a single line is left; for, as you know, the Romans had to leave Britain at the beginning of the fifth century, and soon after fierce hordes of



THE ROMAN WALL.

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warriors sailed over the North Sea and plundered the coast lands of Britain, and when they found the country rich and the inhabitants unable to defend their lands, they settled in Britain and drove the Celts over to the mountainous western parts and the extreme south west. But the Celts were not all destroyed ; they found refuge in Wales and Cornwall, and the songs of their heroes went with them and in later days became part of English Literature which, like all notable literatures and like the English people themselves, has many different strains in it.

The new conquerors, who became known as the Anglo-Saxons, were very different from the Romans, and had little to give in place of what they destroyed. They were a roving people whose joy in life was fighting, who loved the violent clash of weapons and found music in the noise of battle. The arts of peace were nothing to them ; they had no wish to build towns or to dwell in them. We are told that they were uneasy if they had not each a large open space in front of their dwelling places, and when they settled, they liked to keep each of their small hamlets separate from its neighbour.

Year after year they came to Britain, plundering and destroying, exulting in battle and hoping for no better death than to die fighting. To the Celts they must have seemed terrible, inhuman creatures, greedy for plunder and without mercy for men ; for the Britons could not possibly have known that their terrifying conquerors were, in their own homes and among their own kin, simple and faithful folks, with many good qualities such as loyalty in the service of their lord, and faithfulness in friendship. The thanes,

as the Saxon warriors called themselves, guarded their chief in battle and gave up their lives to save his. They lived, as much as they could, under his roof, sitting at table with him in his hall, where they loved to gather when the day's fighting was done. Then the lord would share among them the booty that they had taken in battle, and he was often called the "ring-giver," because he would give to his men the silver or gold armlets, rings or ornaments taken from the conquered. His wife and her maidens, richly dressed, filled the metal cups out of which her husband and his guests drank, and the lady was much honoured and men expected from her wise counsel, for one of her duties was to speak "wise words." The thanes would sit at table, or round the great hearth, talking of the deeds they had done in their fighting, and remembering other fights in which men now dead had won much glory, and telling of treasures guarded by dragons whom only great heroes might overcome, until a minstrel would arise and sing to them in long, flowing verse the stories of these heroes who were their own ancestors—whose memory was prized by them as a treasured inheritance.

The bond between the thane and his lord was very close, and if the leader was killed in battle and his hall ruined, then the thane was indeed an unhappy man. He felt himself to be alone and desolate in an unfriendly world, and was as miserable as a child who lets go his nurse's hand in a dark place, and cannot find her again. He hated to be cut off from his kindred and to have to wander out among strange people, or to be driven to cross the cold icy seas in search of a new lord and protector. The thought of such a fate made him sad

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and gloomy and, in spite of the bravery with which he fought human enemies, there were many things which filled him with fear. Dark, strange places, misty moorlands and caves where dread creatures, half human, half demon, might lurk made him shudder; and although he faced danger and death in battle with exultation in his heart, the thought of death troubled him deeply, when he sat quietly turning over in his mind the problems that he found in life. There must have been many scenes in Britain to remind him of the shortness of man's life on earth. There were ruined Roman walls and fortifications, banqueting halls once peopled with happy hosts of men, which were now roofless and made desolate by time and the hands of the new invaders. So the great desire of the Saxon chieftain was to gain as much glory as he could in the short time that was his, so that when he died his name might live after him. For this reason he welcomed most warmly to his hall the man who could best help him to do this—the wandering poet or scôp, as he was called, who would sing to other men the deeds of his host and of his host's warlike ancestors.

The poet did not write down his songs—sagas, they came to be called—for even if he could have done so, few of the warriors could have read them. He sang them aloud, and men learnt them by heart and taught them to their sons who, in turn, passed them on to their sons, but they were not written down; and as time went on changes crept into the saga. Men added new lines, or left out old ones, or changed them to suit new fashions of speech or thought, until at last one of two things happened: either the old sagas were neglected and forgotten and so died away, or someone

who cared for poetry took the trouble to write down on parchment the poems he liked, and so make what is called a manuscript copy of them, that is, a book written with the hand. But as we shall see, there is a great gap in time between the days when the scôp made his saga and the day when the industrious scribe wrote it down. Here is an instance. When the Saxons and their allies were making their raids on the coast of Britain in the beginning of the sixth century, one of the sagas which was sung to them at their feasts told of the great deeds of a hero called *Beowulf*, and the frightened Britons may have crouched outside listening. To-day, we may go to the British Museum and see there a manuscript copy of this very saga, made by some unknown scribe more than 400 years after the poem was first sung. During these 400 years there had been many changes in language as the poem shows by the word forms which it uses ; but there was one much greater change than this. The scôp who made the saga and the heroes who were praised in it were pagans ; the man who wrote it down as we have it was a Christian. This manuscript is very precious and many scholars have handled it reverently, for it is the only long poem of all the sagas of the Anglo-Saxon warriors which has been saved for us, and if *Beowulf* had been lost we should have had little but fragments of poems to tell us about our pagan ancestors. Even with *Beowulf* the whole of the Saxon poetry which has been preserved for us is very little in bulk and could be contained in a slender volume, but enough has remained to show us what kind of men these Saxons really were, and what kind of things they loved and hated, and what they feared and hoped for in life.

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This is the story of Beowulf. There lived, in some coastland country of northern Europe, a warlike race called the Scyldings, whose king, Hrothgar, descended from heroes, had built a wonderful hall at Heorot so that his warriors might gather there to feast with him in the evenings. Here Hrothgar sat sharing out rings and treasures to his followers, and listening to the songs of minstrels. But the joy of the Scyldings in their well-built hall did not last long. Unknown to them, a terrible monster called Grendal was plotting mischief against them. Grendal lived across a dreary fenland among the haunts of wolves and near a gloomy mere where a baleful fire burned at night. No man dare visit this evil place, and when darkness came Grendal used to stalk over the fen searching for prey. He had heard the sound of happy feasting in Heorot, and had been angered by it; so he set out at nightfall and reached the hall where the warriors lay sleeping after their feast. He seized and slew thirty of them and carried off his spoils in triumph to his den. Great was the grief in Heorot when the king heard of the evil deed and saw what had happened in his hall. Next night came Grendal again, and slew even more thanes than he had done before, so that men would not stay in the hall when darkness came and it stood at night deserted.

For twelve years the monster vexed the Scyldings, lying in wait for them, and they could find no way to rid themselves of this horror. News of their troubles went over the sea and a brave warrior called Beowulf heard of it, and with his followers set sail in a strong vessel which drove through the foaming waves, swift as a bird.

They come to Hrothgar's land and march up the stony street to Heorot. Hrothgar sits there with his warriors around him and welcomes Beowulf, whose father has been his friend. Beowulf offers his services to rid the Scyldings of their monstrous enemy, and he is entrusted with the guardianship of the Hall at nightfall. After the feast which is given to welcome Beowulf, the Scyldings leave the hall to Beowulf and his thanes. The hero takes off his armour and lays aside his sword, for it is his intention to grapple with the monster unarmed. His thanes fall asleep and he alone is watching when Grendal comes stalking from his fen, tears open the door, and seeing the sleeping warriors, seizes one and tears him to pieces, drinking the blood from his veins and cracking his bones. He is minded to seize hold of Beowulf, but as soon as he has felt the hero's grip he knows that he has met his match. Beowulf grapples with him, and the terrible noise of their struggle shakes the very hall. The warriors would have come to the aid of their leader, but their weapons cannot injure the fiend and so Beowulf fights him alone, and by sheer strength tears Grendal's arm out of its socket and Grendal, howling with pain, makes off to his lair over the fen to die there.

Great honour is given to Beowulf, and his praises are sung in the hall by a minstrel who makes up a saga for Beowulf in which he is compared with the heroes of other sagas. The arm of Grendal is hung up in the hall and great treasure is given to Beowulf, and the queen herself thanks him with jewels and gracious words.

But that night another enemy comes to the hall of the Scyldings. Grendal's hag-like mother, filled with

fury at her son's death, bursts into the hall, seizes the king's dearest friend, kills him and escapes to the fen. Hrothgar sends for Beowulf who undertakes to attack the new monster in her lair. He takes with him some of his men, and they make their way through the haunted country to the gloomy lake near Grendal's home which is feared by all living creatures. He leaves his men on the edge of the lake and plunges down to its depths. The hag attacks him under the waves and draws him into her cavern at the bottom of the lake, where a bitter struggle is waged. Beowulf's sword will not bite on the body of the evil hag and he throws it aside. While he is still wrestling, he catches sight of a sword lying near him. He snatches it, and as it is a magic sword, the first blow that he strikes with it kills the hag. Then he sees near him the dead body of Grendal. He cuts off the head and returns with it through the waters of the lake to the anxious warriors who have seen the waters turn red with blood.

Thus Beowulf finished his chosen task and won glory among the Scyldings. Laden with treasure, he and his men return to their ship, to seek their own land again and tell there the tale of their adventure.

When next we hear of Beowulf, he is an old man who has been king over his people for many years. It happened that a certain countryman stumbled un-awares on the treasure hoard of a fierce dragon and took away a golden cup to give to his master whom he had offended. When the dragon awoke and found that his hoard had been rifled, he raged in anger. He breathed fire on the homesteads, and they were consumed with flames. Everywhere he went he brought ruin to the people, and he did not spare even the king's

hall. Beowulf goes out once more to fight with another monster. He and a few followers are led by the terrified countryman to the place of the dragon's hoard, a lonely place near the sea. Here he awaits the dragon, who comes towards him breathing out flames and fiery smoke. All his followers except one desert him. The old king fights the dragon and kills him but he is himself wounded to death. He rests by the treasure hoard and, knowing he is to die, he sends his faithful follower to bring out the hidden gold. He gives him his last commands and tells him to raise a high mound, overlooking the sea, which is to be called Beowulf's Mound and serve to keep his memory alive. Then he dies, and his people build for him a great pyre on which his body is burnt, and with it armour, and some of the dragon's gold. Twelve of his chiefs rode round the funeral mound mourning for him ; and this was what they said of him—

“ he was a world king,
Of men the mildest and to men kindest,
To his people most pleasant, and for praise most
eager.”

The saga of Beowulf was one of the many sagas that were sung at the feasts of the Anglo-Saxons ; but it is the only one that has remained for us to read to-day, and it is enough to show us clearly what themes the saga-maker liked to use—fighting and feasting, brave heroes and treasure guarded by fire breathing dragons. It can also tell us a great deal about our language, and the shape and form of our earliest poetry.

You will remember that our only copy of *Beowulf* is some hundreds of years younger and therefore

nearer to our own time than the saga as it was first sung, but if you were to try to read this copy you would find it almost impossible to make out more than a very few words, and even if you looked into a printed version of the old saga you would still be unable to understand it, unless you had someone at your elbow to turn it into modern English. It is true that our modern English is the direct descendant of Anglo-Saxon, but it has changed very much in the course of many years, and there are many differences both in the way in which words are put together in sentences and in the words themselves.

One of the differences is this. The Anglo-Saxons had far fewer words in their language than we have now, for we have added new words, many of which we have borrowed from other countries. Their poets, however, made a way of their own out of this difficulty. When they felt the need for a new word they made one by joining together two words, and so making a third which was different in meaning from either of the two from which it was made. There is a fragment of poetry even older than *Beowulf* which is called *Widsith*. It begins—

“Widsith spoke, he unlocked his word-hoard,” that is to say, “began to utter words.” Now to-day we have a number of words we might use instead of “word-hoard”; speech, diction, vocabulary, language, are some of them, and from these we can choose exactly the one which best gives the shade of meaning we require, but none of them, I think, is as striking and vivid as “word-hoard.” These words, of which I have given only one example, give to Anglo-Saxon poetry a vivid directness which is one of its finest qualities.

There is also another, greater difference to be noted. This early poetry would seem to our ears very irregular and harsh-sounding for two reasons. The scôp, when he was making his poetry, did not think it necessary to make all his lines of the same length by giving to each more or less the same number of syllables. As long as each of his lines had four well-marked stresses and a pause somewhere about the middle of the line, he was content. Generally the syllables which carried the stress began with the same letter, and this gave a certain regularity to the lines. Nor did he trouble to make the last syllables of his lines match in sound, that is to say, he did not make them rhyme as poets do now.

If you look at the quotation with which the story of *Beowulf* ends, you will see an example of this kind of poetry, for the translator whose lines I have quoted tried as far as he could to imitate in modern English the verse plan of the Anglo-Saxon.

Besides *Beowulf*, we have another precious manuscript of Saxon poetry, made by the order of a certain Bishop Leofric, and given by him to the cathedral of Exeter in 1046. The manuscript contains a collection of short poems made about the same time as *Beowulf*, some of them unfinished, and all of them very much shorter than the saga. They tell us of another side of Anglo-Saxon life, of the wandering minstrel's life and of the Courts where he has sung, or of the hardships, such as loneliness, the loss of an overlord or separation from loved ones, or of the ruin of cities and the dying out of men. One of these poems we call *The Seafarer*. It tells of the lot of a lonely sailor in the cold northern seas, tossed by terrible waves and frozen by icy

14 THE PROGRESS OF ENGLISH LITERATURE.

winds. The sailor hears the desolate cries of the sea birds, and longs for the laughter of his fellow men whom he pictures sitting, safe and happy, in the mead hall of some great man. But he knows that in spite of his envy of their peaceful life he himself cannot rest long on land. The sea, he knows, will call to him, and he will set out again to taste new dangers.

This manuscript contains also a number of riddles in verse. The Anglo-Saxons evidently liked to guess the answer to these riddles, perhaps when they lay beside the fire in the winter evenings ; some of the riddles contained a great deal of wisdom and were meant to set men thinking about serious things.

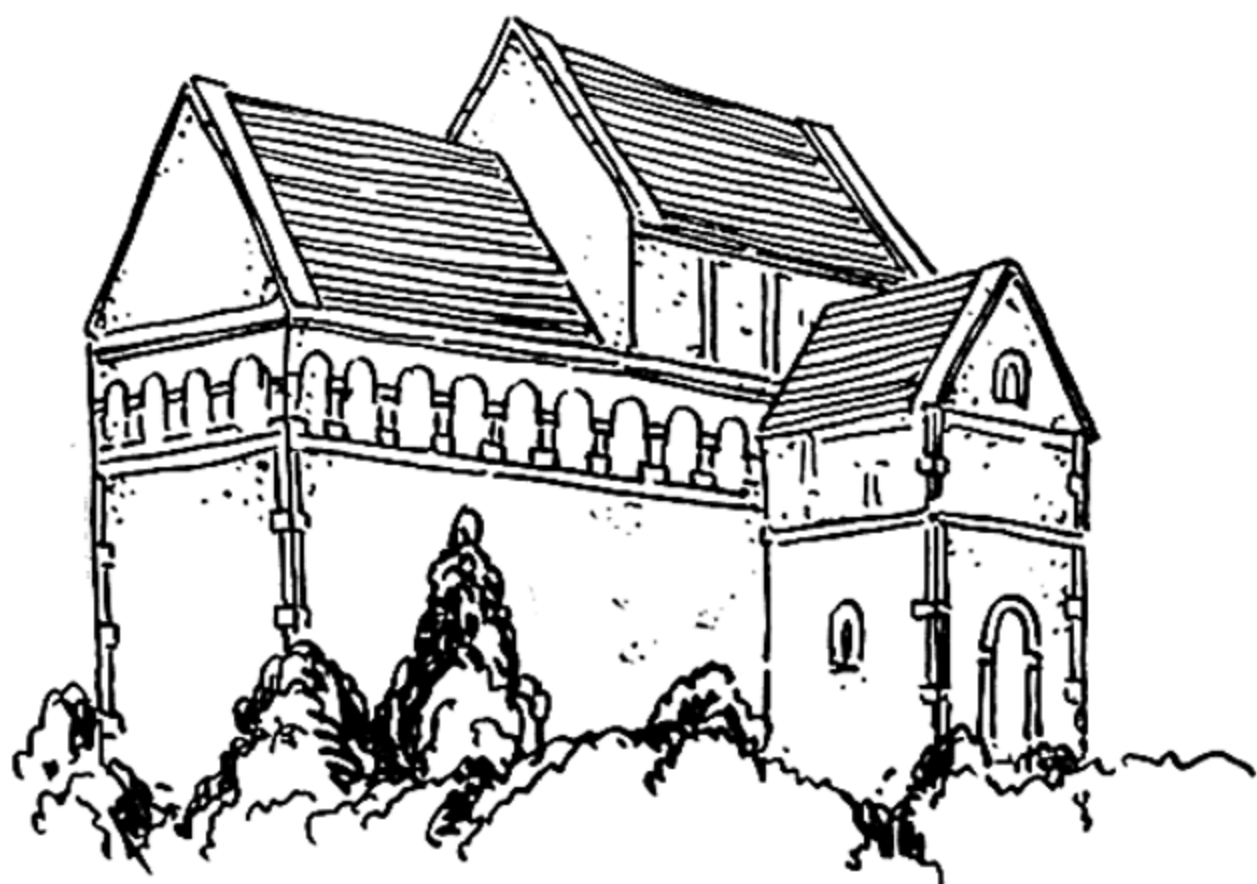
II.

✓ At the end of the sixth century a great change came over the country of the Anglo-Saxons. England was visited by missionaries from Rome and accepted the Christian faith. The gospel of Christ, who had preached peace on earth and told men to humble themselves rather than to seek glory, must have sounded strange in the ears of the Saxons, for their religion had taught them a different code.

Even after they had become Christians, they did not quite forget their old code. There are many traces of their earlier beliefs in the literature they made after their conversion ; for although the subject matter of these new poems was taken from the Scriptures, and their heroes were no longer men like Beowulf, but Christ and Moses, or St. Andrew and the Apostles, the poets sometimes gave to these heroes qualities more suited to the heroes of pagan days. Many of the poets

must also have been monks, inhabitants of the monasteries that grew up swiftly in Christian England, and gave shelter to those who wished to devote their lives to learning, and to teaching others to serve God.

The first English poet whose name is known to us was a servant in a monastery at Whitby. His name



A SAXON CHAPEL.

was Cædmon, and he would never have sung at all if an angel had not bade him make a song in honour of God's creation. His story is told to us by a holy and learned monk called Bede, who wrote in Latin the history of the English people, and was one of those who did much to spread learning throughout England. Of another poet of these days we know little except his name—Cynewulf, but several long poems on sacred

subjects are thought to have been written by him and these we still possess.

So far we have spoken only of poetry, which in English, as in almost all languages, comes earlier than prose. Now we must turn to the work of a great Saxon



THE VENERABLE
BEDE.

who determined that he would raise his people from the ignorance which had overtaken them, and bring them to knowledge and light. This was Alfred, justly called the Great, who was king over the West Saxons from 871 to 901.

About eighty years before Alfred became king, a terrible enemy appeared on the east coast of England, and ravaged the coastlands just as the Saxons had done before they drove away the Britons, and settled in their country. These were the Danes. The Saxons had never learnt to make for themselves a single united kingdom, and, although they fought their

utmost, they could not prevent their enemies from making good their footing in England, and in 851 the Danes began to settle there. The Danes were not Christians, and they savagely destroyed the outward signs of Christianity in England. They pillaged and ruined the monasteries, killed the monks, and destroyed the books they had made or gathered together, so that no one was left to teach men to read or to think, and the Saxons might easily have come to forget all they had learnt.

When Alfred was a boy he had spent some of his time in Rome, and had learnt there to love the religion of Christ, and the learning which had grown up under its shelter. He grieved deeply over the ignorance into which his poor harassed country was sinking, and his great desire was to give her peace and enlightenment. But even when he became king, he had to spend seven or eight years struggling to drive back the Danes and put an end to their inroads. After many difficulties he was successful, and peace gave him a chance to work out all those plans he had been so long preparing.

First of all, he sent to more fortunate countries for scholars to take the place of those whom England had lost. He saw that there were plenty of books for those who were able to read Latin, but hardly any at all for those who could only speak their native Saxon, and, as he was most anxious that his subjects should be able to read their own language, he himself set about providing them with books that they could read. So to all his other duties he added this. He did not try to invent new books. He believed it would be better for his people to be able to read in their own language famous Latin books, which had long been read by scholars, and would best teach Englishmen what was most needful for them to know.

He chose two well-known Latin histories ; one told of the history of the world, and had been put together by a monk called Orosius, the other was that History of England which I have mentioned, written by the learned Bede. He also translated from the Latin a letter of good advice from one of the great Popes who had been anxious that his priests should serve God

well ; and he translated another book, one which had been praised by all learned men ever since it had been written in prison by a certain Boethius. This book told men how to face all troubles with a resolute peace of mind.

King Alfred translated very freely. If he thought his people would not understand a passage which he had translated he would add his own explanation,



KING ALFRED.

which he did not put in a footnote at the bottom of his page, but wove into his translation. And once, he put in a whole passage which was certainly not in the book he was translating—an account of the travels of two of his sailors just as they had told it to him on their return. One of these men, Othere, had sailed far into the northern seas and

had seen strange things unknown to other men, some of which he brought back for the king to see. It is pleasant for us to think that one of the earliest pieces of prose in our literature tells of adventure on the sea and in strange lands.

Alfred encouraged other men to write in Saxon, and especially those whose duty it was to keep the record, year by year, of what happened in the kingdom. These records or chronicles, as they were called, had been begun many years before Alfred's time and had been kept by monks, probably in Latin. But from Alfred's time they were written in Saxon, and one chronicler

followed another with hardly a gap, till about a hundred years after the Norman conquest.

Of the many services Alfred rendered to his people, his labours to give them wisdom was not the least, and all men who care for literature look back to Alfred with loving admiration, thus fulfilling the king's chief desire. For in one of the passages he inserted in his translation he says—

“Every good gift and every power soon groweth old and is no more heard of, if Wisdom be not in them. To be brief, I may say that it has ever been my desire to live honourably while I was alive, and after my death to leave to them that should come after me my memory in good works.”

His own people did not forget Alfred after his death. In spite of the fresh attacks of the Danes they tried to carry on his work. Books were written in Saxon which gave good advice to the people, some were in the form of sermons and were called homilies. These, as we should expect, dealt with serious subjects; they reminded men of their duties, and of the reward or punishment which would be their lot in the next world. One learned man called Ælfric, who lived about seventy years before the Norman conquest, carried on the good work of King Alfred by making a Latin grammar for Saxon schoolboys to use. To help to make their work interesting he also made up conversations between the master and the boys, and we still have one of these dialogues written in Saxon, in which we can read something about the lives and lessons of boys in Saxon England.

But in spite of these efforts, Anglo-Saxon literature

began to grow less and less vigorous. No more poets came to make splendid songs like that of Beowulf, and no one was found who could tell lively or moving stories in prose, and so men did not find their own literature very interesting. Across the channel, in Normandy, lived a race of people who had a great many poets, and delighted to listen to their songs. These were the Normans, who were soon to conquer England and to impose their language on the conquered Saxons.

Even before the Norman conquest there were many Normans in England, for Edward the Confessor, although he was an English king, was said to prefer Normans to Saxons, and in many respects they did prove themselves more learned and more skilful in handicrafts, and were often given very high positions. So it was not surprising that after the Conquest Anglo-Saxon speech was heard no more in the Court, or among the wealthy and powerful people in the towns. In the country, it lingered on in the mouths of the peasants and was heard by them in sermons preached in church, but on the whole it was despised and neglected, and its place was taken by the speech of the conquerors, which is generally called Anglo-Norman. But it did not die. Just as, in the country, a field which has produced good crops is allowed to rest for a time without being sown with seed, so the language of the Saxons rested, and for more than 150 years after the Norman conquest showed hardly any sign of life. But this long rest gave it strength and vigour, and in the end enabled it to overcome the language that had usurped its place and to become once more the national language of England and Englishmen.

CHAPTER II.

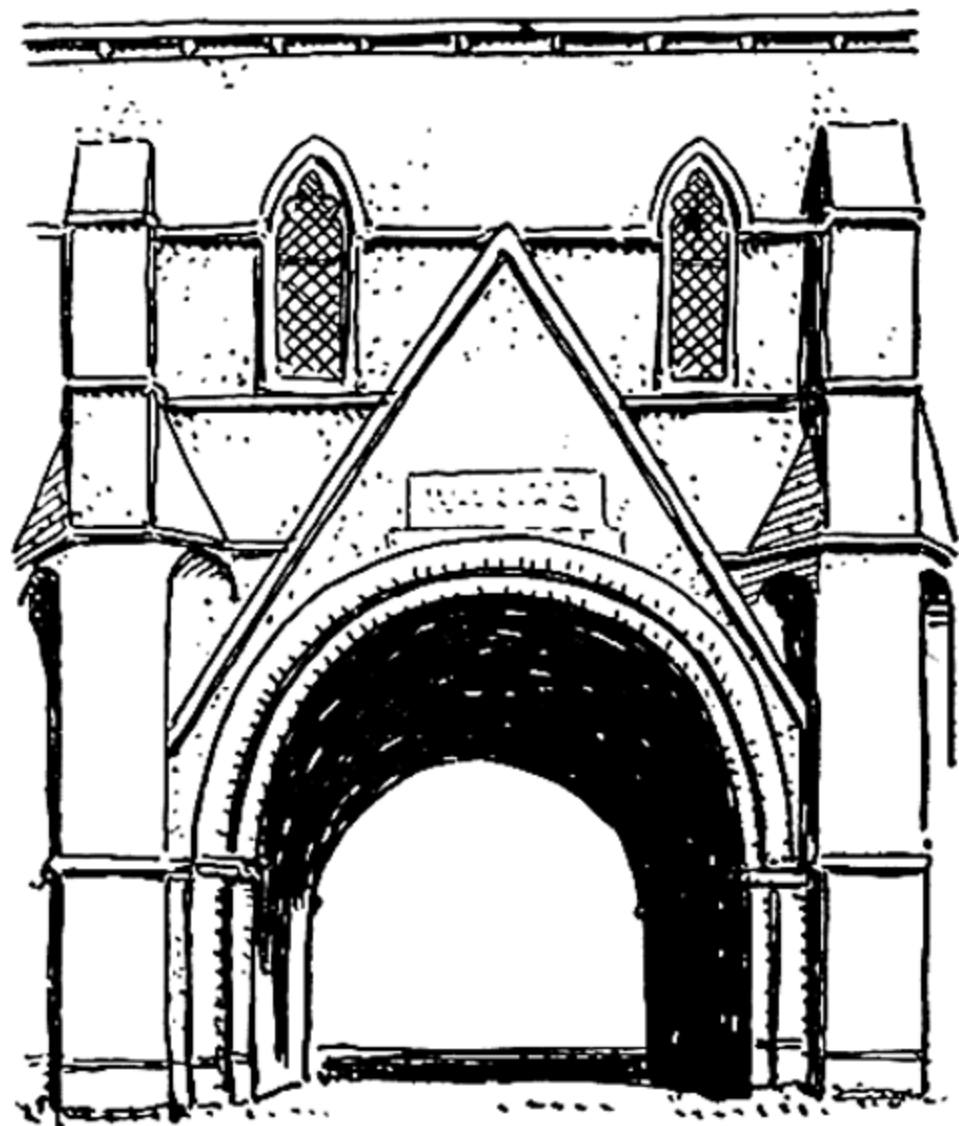
AFTER THE CONQUEST.

IN 1066 England was conquered for a third time by a foreign race. Her new conquerors were in some ways not unlike her earlier conquerors, the Romans. They were warlike and adventurous, and they were also highly civilized and cared, as the Romans had done, for the arts of peace. They, too, were great builders, and they enlarged the small Saxon churches they found in England, or built larger and more spacious ones with lovely vaulted roofs. They were a gay and witty people who loved amusement such as hunting and hawking out of doors, and indoors, music and songs. These songs they brought with them from France, and as long as the Norman kings ruled England, and indeed until the reign of Edward I, the poetry that was sung in the English Court and the homes of the great lords was as much like the poetry of France as the Norman poets could make it.

During this time England was in very close contact with France, she held possessions there and some of her queens were French princesses; and in France, especially in that part which is called Provence, there were then very many poets who were singing those short songs which we call lyrics, that is to say, poems in which the poet tells us, not stories of other people, but something about his own moods and feelings.

If you were to look at one of these lyrics you would at once recognize it as a poem, even if you could not understand it, because the shape of it would show you

that the poet had planned to build it up out of a certain number of lines, some long and some short, arranged according to his fancy. If anyone were to read it to you, you would be able to hear that echoing of certain sounds which would tell you that the poet



GATEWAY OF READING ABBEY: FOUNDED 1121.

had used rhyme. You will remember that the Anglo-Saxon poet did not feel bound to make his lines of equal length with each other, nor did he use rhymes; but the French poets who had studied Latin hymns and had found in them lines of equal length containing a definite number of syllables ending with rhyme, made up their own songs after this pattern; and the great

thing to remember is that when these French poems were translated into the English language and the English language was at length ready for poetry again, the English translators kept the French shape or form of verse, and did not go back again to the Anglo-Saxon form.

Besides the lyrics of Provence the French people had much longer poems which were called romances. These told of the brave deeds of knights for their ladies, their adventures, the enchantments of wizards and the power of love. Sometimes they told of the friendship of two men which was stronger than their love for their ladies. Sometimes the scene of these stories was set in the East, in Greece or in Troy, and the heroes were the men who had taken part in the great war between the Greeks and the Trojans; sometimes the scene was set in the West, and the heroes were King Arthur or King Charlemagne, and their knights.

These romances also were translated into English, and the translator still kept the French form of verse or made up a new one like it. Even when the poem was not a translation, and told of the history of England, the poet was influenced by the newer kind of verse, even if he did not entirely adopt it. This is the case in one of the earliest of English poems written after the Norman conquest—a history of England by a monk called Layamon. Layamon, who is thought to have made his poem at the beginning of the thirteenth century, called it the *Brut*, because he liked to think that a certain man called Brutus, descended from the Trojans who founded Rome, was the first to discover England. He did not mean to use the new form of poetry, and the greater part of his poem is in the old

form, but there are many traces of the influence of rhyme and regularity, and as time went on the English poets came to use rhyme and regularity or metre (as it is called) for all their poems, and they became the recognized marks of poetry. Only a few poems were written in the old form of verse which is called alliterative, and in the fourteenth century poets did not use alliterative verse at all, unless, like the author of *Piers Plowman*, they had some special reason for doing so.

✓ By the middle of the thirteenth century the English language had slowly and surely regained her power.

✓ Anglo-Norman, once the speech of the upper classes, had died away. For some time the two languages kept pace side by side. Poems were written in which Latin, French and English lines are to be found in the same verse. Some poems, written in English, have an Anglo-Norman refrain, but Englishmen were beginning to feel that their own language was the proper language for Englishmen to use, both in speech and in literature. So English conquered her former rival; and in the process of conquering she learnt many things from her. She had, as we have seen, borrowed the forms of French poetry and some of the stories. She took over also many words and gave them a place in English. She used, as her own, French turns of speech, but she remained English. In the second half of the thirteenth century songs were written in English; romances, many of them about English heroes, were made in English; and there was some English prose writing, but not a great deal. But although some of the lyrics were fresh and charming, and many of the romances had passages of beauty, much of the poetry that was then made was awkward and clumsy. What was needed

was some really great poet who could bend and fashion the strong young language into beauty and harmony, and thus show Englishmen the possibilities of their own language. And at last this poet came, and his name was Geoffrey Chaucer.

Chaucer, it is believed, was born in the year 1340 in London, not very far from the great river which was to mean so much to him later, to give him occupation and delight. Of his early years we know little, but it is clearly to be seen from his poetry that his schooling was not neglected. Not only was Chaucer a poet, but he was also a very learned man—as his day reckoned learning—and therefore a desirable man to send on



important missions to foreign lands and Courts. He could read and write English, and comparatively few men except priests and lawyers could do as much or more ; he knew Latin and could speak and read French and Italian. He had studied philosophy and the movements of the stars. How much of all this learning, which was after all a very small part of his real greatness, he got at school is doubtful, nor do we know where his school was. He has himself left us a picture of a school such as he might have attended in *The*

Prioress's Tale. Here we see the little boy of seven sitting at his place, supposed to be getting his task by heart, but really listening to the bigger boys who are being trained to be choir boys, and are therefore learning to sing one of the Latin hymns they may, perhaps, have to sing in the great church of St. Paul's; for, although the lady who tells us this story says the little boy lived "in Asye, in a greet citee," we may not be very far wrong if we think of the school he went to as though it were a school in Chaucer's own land and time.

The big boy, in the story, tells the little boy who is questioning him that he can manage to sing his Latin hymn and that he knows in a vague way what it is all about, though he confesses that he does not know much Latin and he does not seem to want to. This big boy was certainly not like Chaucer, who must have been a very good scholar, so good perhaps that he caught the eye of some great nobleman who cared for learning, for we know that when he was seventeen he had been taken to Court to wait upon the Duchess of Clarence, daughter-in-law to the great King Edward III.

The way in which we came to know of the presence of young Chaucer at the Court is so interesting and amusing that you may like to hear of it. After Chaucer's death, in 1400, a younger poet, called Lydgate, who had admired Chaucer very much, wrote a poem, of which a copy in the handwriting of the fifteenth century (for there was no printing done in England till 1476), was preserved and can still be seen at the British Museum. In the covers of this MS. were found the household accounts of the very Duchess of

Clarence who numbered Chaucer in her train, for the officer in charge of her moneys had there entered the costs and expenses of her household, and recorded (little knowing what delight he was to give hundreds of years later by his entry) that in 1357 he laid out seven shillings on a suit of clothes for one, Geoffrey Chaucer. The suit had as its most important items a short cloak, black and red breeches and shoes, such as you may see painted in some of the illuminated books of this period. In another place the same careful accountant has noted that two shillings and sixpence was given to Chaucer for necessaries at Christmas. We can picture the lad in his new red and black suit going to Court in the train of his mistress, or making the long journey to Hatfield, in Yorkshire, where the Duchess had her country home, but we can only wonder what his feelings were, and whether he felt proud and pleased and held his head high, or whether he felt shy and uneasy. We still have a picture of Chaucer which was made by one who knew him as an older man. The picture shows him dressed in dark clothes of a sober cut; perhaps he lost his liking for gay clothes as he grew older, or perhaps he liked them better on young people; but it is quite certain that he liked to see beautiful colours and feel good textures, for you will see how often in his poems he notices, with approval, finely-wrought materials and how he delights to dress his knights and ladies in well-tempered armour or lovely linen. You will notice also, when you read his description of the men and women who went on the famous pilgrimage to Canterbury, that Chaucer took note of the way in which people dressed themselves for another reason. He believed that people often

revealed their characters to those who were watching them by little tricks in speech and habits in dress, of which they were themselves hardly aware. And so you will find that Chaucer, who must always have been watching people, describes certain oddities in the appearance of his pilgrims, because he expects us to guess from them what their characters really were.

The young boy in the red and black suit probably went about looking very demure, with eyes downcast. We know that this staring at the ground was a trick of Chaucer's, but he must have found courage to raise his eyes when there was anything worth seeing, and swift, shrewd glances probably told him all that he wanted to know.

He must have been a very desirable companion, for under his demure appearance lay a very strong and easily aroused sense of fun ; he could not help seeing how amusing life could be, and how liable the grown-up courtiers were to become affected and laughable. And besides, he loved reading, and his wonderful knowledge of the stories of those heroes and heroines the Court liked most to hear of, was to make him much in request in a time when there were few books and readers, and no theatres as we have them ; when ladies and gentlemen had to depend for their indoor amusement on the efforts of the singer-poets, who would tell and retell new and old stories of knightly love and adventure to the listening circle of courtiers. This was how Chaucer began. He practised saying what French poets were saying and the way in which they said it. He had a very delicate ear for the melody of words, and could make up songs and poems that sounded as pleasant in English as they might have done in

French, and this was a great deal to accomplish, for English had sometimes been looked down on as unsuited to poetry before Chaucer came to show what he could do.

But if this was all that Chaucer was to do, it would never explain why people to-day go on reading and enjoying him, for we have had fuller and deeper word music since his day. Fashions in literature change and become tarnished just as fashions in dress and speech wear out; and they do this because they are only like the froth on the top of deep, quick-moving water. The foam sparkles and looks pretty and takes our eye away from the water which is deep and strong; and so gay and pleasing word music is not really poetry unless it has also strength and depth, and a poet gets these two things not by trying to write what other poets have written in the way that they wrote it, that is, in the fashionable way, but by writing what he sees in life and feels and knows about the men and women in it.

It was because Chaucer knew this that we look on him as a great poet. He began by following the fashion of the poets of his day, but he did not do so very long. As he grew up his life gave him many chances of seeing more of men and their ways than Court life could have done. He went to the French wars, fought, was taken prisoner and ransomed. Thus he learnt about soldiers. He was sent to Genoa on business of the State. There he would meet the famous Genoese merchants and their sailors, and see the customs of other nations and hear their songs. He went to Flanders, France, and back to Italy and returned to England to take up the duties of a post

which was to bring him in touch with still more people, the sailors and riverside officers of the port of London. He had to sit in an office and keep a record of the duties to be paid on wool and other articles. After all his foreign travel he may well have found making out bills of lading dull work, but this work must often have been broken in upon by the welcome visit of some returned traveller, with his hands full of strange treasures



ALDGATE.

and his head full of still more precious matters, stories of other lands. Out of all these experiences, and out of the books that he pored over, "domb as any stoon," in the house over one of the gates of the city, where he returned after his day's work, he found material for poetry.

Of Chaucer's earlier poems, apart from the translations with which he began, the most important is *The Parlement of Foules*. Here the poet tells us how he spent his day poring over an ancient book, and when light failed and he could read no more, he went to bed and dreamt that the hero of his book came to him as a guide. This guide led him to a park walled round with green stones and, as he was hesitating at the gate, pushed him through. Once inside the gate the poet finds himself in a beautiful garden with fresh green trees and flowers, "white, blewe, yelwe, and rede." Birds are singing in every tree and little rabbits play

to do
ture

in the grass. Chaucer loved the country in spring, and this is only one of the many pictures he has left us of the fresh beauty of the English countryside. To the garden every kind of bird has come in honour of St. Valentine's Day, and they talk together as though they were men and women arguing with each other. The poem ends with all the birds singing together a song called a roundel which begins—

“Now welcome somer, with thy sonne softe.”

This song is written in a French measure, but the rest of the poem is in the seven-line stanza which Chaucer used so skilfully that it is called Chaucer's metre.

Another of Chaucer's poems begins in the same way with a dream, *The Hous of Fame*. But in this dream a great eagle seizes on Chaucer and carries him off in his claws up into the sky. Chaucer is terrified till he suddenly thinks that Jove may be meaning to make him into a star. The eagle, who is rather stern with him, reads his thought and rebukes him for conceit, and he is taken up into a strange house and sees strange things. Chaucer is always ready to laugh at himself, and often makes himself out to seem rather foolish. *modest*

There is still another poem which tells us of Chaucer's dreams. This is called *The Legende of Good Women*. The poet has had his heart gladdened by the lovely spring weather, and has torn himself away from his books to spend the whole long day in the sunshine. He goes home at night and falls asleep. The God of Love appears to him, leading by the hand a fair lady whose crown of white and gold is shaped like the

✓ flower Chaucer loved and praised most—the daisy. Love tells Chaucer that he is displeased with him because in his poetry he has shown only false and faithless lovers, and has drawn no pictures of faithfulness in love; and he specially rebukes him for a long poem Chaucer had made on the love story of a beautiful, but faithless, lady called Cressida, who deserted her lover, Troilus. Poor Chaucer tries to explain that although he had drawn pictures of treachery in love he had done so only to show its hatefulness, but he is told not to argue. The lady bids him sing only of good women whose love was true, and he obeys and begins to tell again the stories of famous, loving women in history, Cleopatra, Dido, Lucretia and others whose names were known to all who loved romances.

✓ But when Chaucer comes to tell his *Canterbury Tales* he no longer pretends to dream, and the people he describes are not shadowy dream people, but real men and women, full of life and zest, such as he saw round him in his own fourteenth century England. Much as he loved books he found humanity still more interesting, for he was, as we have seen, a close observer of men.

Chaucer's England was very different from ours. There were far fewer people and no big towns. There were cities, some of them built on the green slope of some hill not far from a river and surrounded by high walls; and although some of them contained great churches and monasteries, these cities would have seemed very small and sleepy to us who are accustomed to big manufacturing towns with their noisy, throbbing traffic and still noisier machinery. There was little machinery in Chaucer's England. Most of the things

that were needed were made by hand, and each trade or handicraft had its own special guild for those who practised it. Thus, there was a separate guild for haberdashers, carpenters, weavers, dyers, grocers and many others. The men who belonged to the guilds were called burghers or citizens. There were men poorer than they, such as the peasants, who tilled the land for others and had few rights. There were others richer, such as merchants and lawyers, and above these were the knights and barons who had titles and a coat of arms; and above them again were the greater nobles and over them the king. Each of these classes was more or less separate and each man kept to his own order,



OLD LONDON BRIDGE.

but there were certain occasions when they all met on equal terms. For instance, members of each class would join together to go on a pilgrimage to certain places where a shrine had been built in honour of some saint; and so, if you wanted to see a band of men and women drawn from all ranks and occupations, you would watch the setting out of a pilgrimage and, if possible, join yourself to it. Chaucer has made it possible for us to do this. In the Prologue to the *Canterbury Tales*, he tells us how he had crossed the Thames and gone to the famous Inn called The Tabard

to spend the night before setting out for the shrine of St. Thomas at Canterbury. While he was there he saw twenty-nine intending pilgrims come into the inn, and he made it his business to speak to all of them. ✕

Now although a man might vow to go on a pilgrimage for some holy reason, such as to give thanks to God for some favour, a great many went on pilgrimages for quite other reasons. A pilgrimage was an outing for many who would not otherwise have got very far from home. It was a chance of excitement and adventure, of meeting new people and seeing strange sights. One of the pilgrims Chaucer met, a woman of a very lively disposition, who was called the Wife of Bath, had managed to travel to Jerusalem, Italy, Spain and Germany by means of these pilgrimages, though she was not a person of very great devotion to the saints. For people like the Wife of Bath a pilgrimage was a holiday, and was to be entered upon in high spirits; pilgrims would laugh and talk freely to one another and easily reveal their character to the watchful listener; so when the Host of the Inn proposed a plan to make their journey still merrier the pilgrims readily agreed. Each of them was to tell four stories, two as they rode to Canterbury, and two as they returned, and the teller of the best story was to have a supper given to him by the rest on their return.

✓ So the *Canterbury Tales* is really a collection of stories such as the pilgrims might have told to each other on their way to their shrine, but it also contains a wonderful description of each of the imaginary pilgrims, and of their talk with each other and their comments on the Tales.

Let us see who the pilgrims were. Of the twenty-nine who set out more than one-third were wearing ✓ the dress of some religious order. One of the things that would have seemed most strange to us in Chaucer's England, would have been the very great number of men and women we should have met with who were wearing the frock and hood ; and as the pilgrimage is



BENEDICTINE MONK.



FRANCISCAN MONK.

meant to show us a typical English gathering it is natural that there should be many religious present. It is also to be noted that some of the best and some of the worst of the pilgrims were wearing the religious ✓ habit.

There was the Monk. No one who looked at him could have helped seeing that he was not a good monk ; for it was the duty of the monk to stay in his own cloister, studying and working hard with his hands. This monk, Chaucer tells us, thought such ideas old-fashioned and " nat worth an oystre " ; he cared for

nothing but hunting and keeping horses, and the sleeves of his gown were of the finest stuff and trimmed grey fur.

There was a Friar. His duty was to travel from place to place, preaching and living in poverty, so as to help others ; but what he really did was to make use of his power to make people give him money. He would force even the poorest widow to give him alms. He was plump and well dressed, and sang gaily and played his harp, but he helped no one.



A PLOUGHMAN.

The pardoner was even worse than this man ; for he went about deceiving the poor ignorant people who believed the ridiculous stories he told them about the pieces of bone he carried about with him, pretending that they were relics of saints and had power to keep away evil.

To make up for the picture of these unworthy men Chaucer has given us the picture of a true priest. This was the "Poure Persone of a Toun," who, with his brother, the Plowman, had joined the pilgrimage. He gave up his whole life to the care of his people, teaching them the gospel and practising what he taught himself. He visited them in sickness or in trouble, no matter how far he had to go or how bitter the weather. He did not rob the poor and often gave back to them the money they were forced to give to the church. He was not afraid of the rich and reproved their sins ;

and he did not seek favours from them or go to London to ask for promotion, but remained with his own people. This was the kind of religious Chaucer admired, and he also praises the Plowman, the Parson's brother, because, though poor, he was hardworking and honest, and always ready to help his neighbour.

There was also a Prioress and her attendants. She was pleasant and dignified, nice in her deportment, charitable, and tender hearted. When her turn came to tell a tale, she told the story of the little Christian boy who was martyred, and this is one of the most beautiful of all the Tales.

The person of highest rank among the pilgrims was the Knight.

“ he loved chivalrie,
Trouthe and honour, freedom and
curtesie.”

He had fought bravely in many wars, but in peace was gentle and modest as a maid. He was plainly dressed as became a soldier, but his son, the squire, was a fashionable young man who curled his hair carefully and followed the fashions of the Court.

The guilds were well represented. There was a haberdasher, a weaver, a tapistry maker, and several other burghers. There was a merchant, a lawyer, a doctor, a cook, a sailor, and a citizen's wife from Bath. All these are described in a very shrewd and humorous fashion by Chaucer. Perhaps his favourite pilgrim was a poor scholar who lived at Oxford, who



A SQUIRE.

✓ loved his learned books far more than gold, who would both gladly learn and gladly teach; but so vivid is his language and so cleverly has he chosen the most striking qualities of their appearance and behaviour, that he makes us see the pilgrims as clearly as if we had been there ourselves, and no other poet could have done this in Chaucer's own day in England or for many years after his death.

In one sense, the Prologue with its descriptions is the most original part of the *Canterbury Tales*; for Chaucer did not invent the tales which he puts into the mouths of the pilgrims, whom he did invent. He simply retold tales which he had heard. Some of the tales may have been told to him in Italy or in England. Some he had read in Italian and in French books. Some were stories about love. One of these, the Knight's Tale, was very like the romances we have spoken of before. Some were tales of patience in suffering and faithfulness. Those which were told by the miller and the sailor and other pilgrims of their order were loose stories of coarse trickery, such as were told in almost every country in Europe. In all there are only about twenty tales, for his poem is unfinished.

✓ But if Chaucer did not invent his stories, he handled them so skilfully that he may be said to have made them his own, for they all bear the marks of his own special poetic powers. He can tell a story in such a way that we do not lose interest in it for a moment. He can describe people so that they seem real to us, and he can make us either love or hate them as he wishes. He can make us laugh by his quick, sly strokes of humour and he can make us sad when he describes

sadness, and he was the first English poet who could do both these things.

His *Tales* are full of amusement, but they are also full of passages of great poetic beauty where the lines are full of musical words swaying in musical measure. He loved clear colours and shapely things, and there is colour, music, and shapeliness in his poetry. He proved once and for all that the English language was fit for great poetry and he used it like a master of language, making new music out of the measures other poets had used and adding new ones of his own. One of these measures or metres which he made for himself, and used in the *Prologue* and in some of the *Tales*, was a very important discovery. It is called the Heroic Couplet, and has been used by nearly every great poet since Chaucer.

Chaucer's poetry won great fame for him even in his own day, and he was much in request at Court where he is said to have read his poems aloud to the king. It is true that he was sometimes in want of money—on one of these occasions he wrote a complaint to his purse on account of her emptiness—but he enjoyed the favour of the Court and the nobles, and was looked up to with great reverence by younger poets, who showed their respect by imitating his poetry. But none of them ever equalled him, not even Gower, who was a favourite poet in Chaucer's own day, nor Lydgate who was younger, nor Occleve, who was another of his followers.

But there was one poet who differed very much from Chaucer, though he sometimes touched the same subjects and described the same sort of people. This was the author of a long poem in alliterative verse called

The Vision of Piers Plowman. Little is known about the author, who is generally believed to have been a poet called John Langland, born near the Malvern Hills which he mentions in the first lines of his poem. The poem is an allegory, that is to say, the characters are not quite real people, but vices and virtues such as bribery, reason, conscience, and the aim of the poet is to teach some truth. Langland was far more dissatisfied with the state of England than Chaucer seems to have been, and he speaks far more bitterly of the unjust lawyers, the idle monks and the deceitful pardoners. He seems to be much more aware of the hardships the poor people suffered, and his sympathy is very much on their side in their struggles against their wrongs. The poem consists of a number of dreams or visions and in one of the last of these Piers Plowman appears, the honest labourer, who is a Christ-like figure and will guide Conscience safely through her enemies.

✓ The people in Chaucer's day were certainly not always happy. Long wars with France had thinned their numbers and the terrible pestilence called The Black Death carried off hundreds of them. There was much poverty, especially in the country where the serfs were often badly treated, and so strong was their sense of their unjust treatment that there were riots and risings. Yet they were not always unhappy. They had their games and amusements, and although few of them could read, and books were only for the rich, they had their own songs and dances and even plays, which they helped to make and in which they acted; and some of these were just as truly poetry as the romances and lyrics which were fashionable at Court.

CHAPTER III.

FOLK BALLADS AND FOLK DRAMA.

IF you have ever watched small children busily at play you will have noticed that they often sing away to themselves, making up a tune as they go and keeping time to it with their movements and actions. Little girls rock their dolls to sleep, swaying the cradle in time to their songs. Boys like to whistle as they go striding along, and soldiers march more easily and more happily if they have a band to make music for them.

As far as we know, it has always been natural for people to sing at their work whenever their work has required regularly repeated movements such as we need in rowing, rocking a cradle, riding, spinning, hauling in nets or sowing seed. It has always been natural for them to dance for joy, and to join with others in dancing to music, and some people think that poetry first began when words were fitted to the tunes that were chanted by men and women at work, and to the measures that they danced together at festivals in honour of their gods. Whether all poetry began in this fashion, we do not know; but that kind of poetry which we have to think of now—ballad poetry—bears many traces of having such an origin.

The ballads were often sung by people who did not make them. They had heard them sung by other people who had in their turn heard someone else sing them, and had, perhaps, changed a line or added a verse, so that we may have slightly different forms of the same ballad; but none of these people had ever

seen a written copy of a ballad, nor could they often have known who first made it. But they kept what they heard safe in their heads, and on winter evenings, sitting round their fires, one of them would sing the ballad songs and the others would join in at the chorus or refrain. So it happened that, even if the people



A PEASANT SOWING.

did not actually make up the whole of the poems, they took their part in keeping them alive and the ballads seem to belong to them rather than to any individual poet or minstrel, and are therefore called folk ballads. Every nation has its own folk ballads, and the same ballad stories were known to folk who lived far apart and spoke different languages ; and it is impossible for us, to-day, to guess when or where the story which the ballad tells was first

told, unless indeed, as sometimes happened, the ballad was founded on some historical fact.

The stories which the ballads told were such as the folk liked to hear and to remember. These stories were often different from what the courtly or more educated people preferred, and, if they were the same, they were told in a different fashion, for they were meant for a different audience. While the courtiers were enjoying their poetic romances, the humbler folk were singing their ballads. The romances were leisurely, and recounted many details, and dwelt on

sentiment. The ballads told of deeds, of what men and women dared and suffered. The words they used were simple and vigorous; they plunged boldly into the heart of the story, wasting no time on introductions or long descriptions, leaving to our imagination the task of filling in the outlines, of guessing what went before and what happened after.

The ballad makers, whoever they were, rarely tell us in their ballads what they themselves thought about the stories they sang, nor do they tell us what we ought to feel when we hear them. They left the story to make its own effect, to appeal to us by its own force alone. But they knew how to tell a story so that its appeal was prompt and powerful. They knew how to choose the most vivid scenes, or the most telling moments, and the words which best expressed them. Read *The Wife of Usher's Well* or the ballad called *Edward*, and you will see what artists they were in their craft. The ballad makers did not waste words but they very often repeated words, phrases, or even whole lines several times in one poem. This they did for two reasons. Sometimes the lines repeated formed the refrain, and had to be remembered by the audience so that they could join in either at the end of each verse or, as in *Binnorie*, for instance, twice in each verse; and sometimes the reason for repeating certain words or lines was to give great meaning to them and great weight. Thus some ballads are made to take the form of a question repeated several times in very much the same form, and answered each time with a different answer till at last the true answer, sometimes a terrible one, is given. This is the case in the ballad of *Edward, Lord Randal* and others.

The stories the folk liked to hear were often grim and tragic ones. This need not surprise us when we remember how often, in the days of the Plantagenet kings, the peasants must have had to witness violent passions and cruel deaths. And even if the king were peace-loving, his nobles were quarrelsome tyrants, and men saw sights which they remembered and told to their children and made into songs. Family feuds, raids, treacherous fighting, jealousy, anger, cruelty, revenge—all these and their victims are shown in the folk ballads. *Chevy Chase*, *Edom o Gordon*, *The Twa Sisters*, *Lord Randal*, *Lord Thomas and Fair Annet*, are the names of tragic ballads and there are many others.

Not all ballads are tragic. The people loved witty jests and quick-witted folk who escaped from some powerful enemy by cleverly answering all his questions, guessing all his riddles, or catching him in the death trap he had set for them. *The False Knight Upon the Road* and *The Water of Wearie's Well* tell this kind of story and end happily. This explains, at least in part, why the greatest hero in the English ballad world was Robin Hood, the outlaw Earl of Huntingdon, who lived in the Forest of Sherwood with his merry men, robbing rich men and comfortable-looking abbots, outwitting sheriffs and never hurting the poor. Many ballads were made about Robin Hood and Little John, his tall archer, and they are full of fighting, jesting and good humour. There were also ballads about King Arthur and some of his Knights, but these are a little different from most of the folk ballads.

The people who listened to the ballads believed in

fairies and elves, in demons and elfin ladies who carried away mortals to fairyland and kept them prisoner there. Thomas the Rhymer saw a lady bright, dressed in grass-green silk, riding on a horse decked with silver bells. He kissed this lady and was carried away to Elfland—

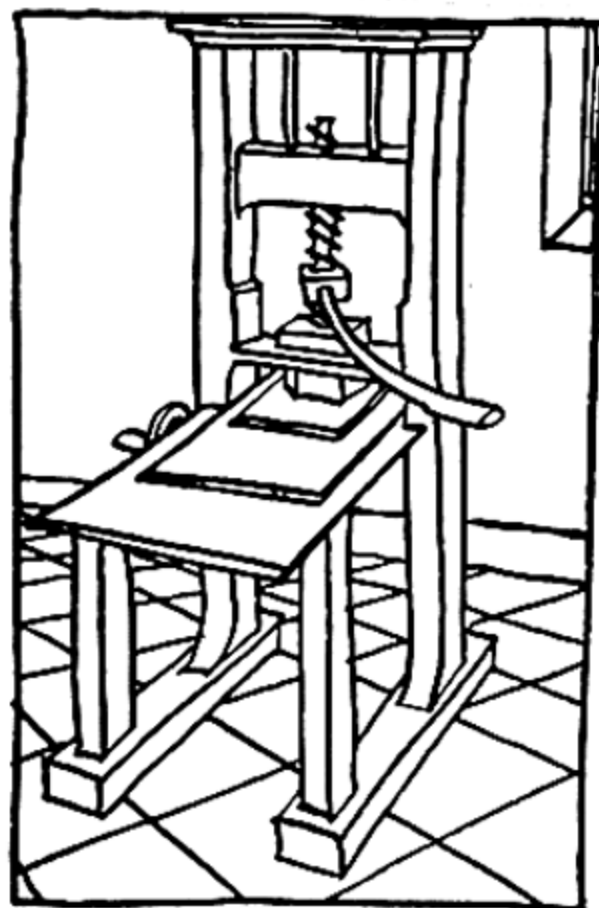
“O they rade on, and farther on,
And they waded rivers abune the knee;
And they saw neither sun nor moon,
But they heard the roaring of the sea.

“It was mirk, mirk night, there was nae starlight,
They waded through red blude to the knee;
For a’ the blude that’s shed on the earth
Rins through the springs o’ that countrie.”

Only after seven years’ time did Thomas come back to earth. In some of the ballads such as *The Wife of Usher’s Well*, the ghosts of the dead come back again. They may walk the earth till cockcrow and then they must disappear. On living people spells and enchantments can be cast to hold them bound against their wills. Birds can understand and speak the language of mortals, and in some ballads they carry messages between faithful lovers who are unable to meet.

Although these beliefs may seem to show that the ballads were made for simple folk, the ballads themselves are not simple, and it is not easy to make one nowadays. Many poets who lived in later days, when the making of ballads had ceased, have tried their utmost to make a ballad which might pass as a genuine old ballad, and none of them except, perhaps, Sir

Walter Scott, has ever managed to recapture the true ballad touch. For there is in the old ballads something at once simple yet powerful, bare yet majestic, which moves our hearts and makes our pulses beat quickly as the music of their changing rhythms rings in our



A PRINTING PRESS.

ears. The great days of ballad making in England stretch back to the thirteenth century, or rather, to speak more correctly, the oldest ballad of which we now have a copy belongs to that century; but there were doubtless folk songs older still which were never written down and so have been lost to us. Most of the finest ballads we possess belong in language and style to the late fourteenth and fifteenth centuries. At the end of the

fifteenth century printing presses were, for the first time, set up in England. At first printed books were very rare and very costly and only the rich could afford to buy them, but as time went on the printing presses began to print broadsides, i.e. single sheets of paper on which a number of verses could be printed and sold for a small sum. These verses or broadside ballads were generally made by some doggerel poet and were rarely as fine poetry as the folk ballads. They were often vulgar and trivial, but they were very popular, especially with the townsfolk, and

by degrees the real ballads were neglected and people did not take the same care as they had done to learn and remember them. But in the country places, the ballads lived on; for country folk had only such broadsides as the travelling pedlar might chance to bring them in his pack, stowed away among his lawns and gloves and laces. They went on, from father to son, singing the true ballads, till at last other people began to renew their interest in these old songs and to collect them, writing them down as they came from the lips of the old men and women who had heard them from their fathers. It was not until the middle of the eighteenth century that this interest in the ballads was felt by men of taste in literature, and at first they were rather timid and apologetic about their enthusiasm for a kind of poetry that sounded strange in the ears of the men of their own time, who were used to a particularly neat and polished kind of poetry. In 1765 Bishop Percy published a collection of ballads called *Reliques of Ancient Poetry*, and awakened great interest in this form of early poetry.

There was another kind of song made and sung in mediaeval England—the carol. This word “carol” came from France and was used at first for songs, often love songs, which were sung by people dancing together; but in English, the word came to be used for the songs which are sung at Christmas time, to tell us about the birth of Jesus, and about Mary his mother, and Joseph, and the shepherds and kings who welcomed Him, and about the wicked king, Herod, who tried to kill Him.

Nowadays, the children who sing carols on our door-steps, when Christmas is coming, do not dance there

as well ; but in mediaeval England, the villagers and the townsfolk took great pride in performing their carols, and they sang them, not only in Latin in the churches, but in English, walking through the streets and in the market-place, keeping in step with the music. Some of the carols they sang were beautiful and tender. One which begins—

“ I sing of a maiden
That is makeles,”¹

tells of the coming of the “ King of Kings,” and is one of the early and loveliest songs in English.

In another Mary speaks to her son—

“ This lovely lady sot and sang
And to her child con say
My sone, my broder, my father dere,
Why liest thou thus in hay ? ”

The story of Bethlehem was very real to the men and women of those days. They felt that Jesus, Mary and Joseph knew them each personally and were very special friends of theirs, interested in all their affairs. At one and the same time they worshipped them as divine and saintlike, and loved them as very dear friends. A story is told of a tumbler, or acrobat, who lived in France in the Middle Ages and made his livelihood by turning somersaults to amuse his audience. He grew tired of tumbling and, wishing to save his soul, he entered a monastery and became a monk. But he found that all the other monks were more learned than he, and knew all the prayers and services which had been made to honour God and the saints ;

¹ Matchless.

but he did not seem able to learn their ways of praising God, try as he would to do so. He became very miserable, being afraid that the monks would turn him out. So he went to the altar of Our Lady and told her that he could not pray and sing like the other monks—the only thing he could do really well was his tumbling. So knowing that she would not despise him if he did the best he could to please her, he took off his long monk's gown and did his finest somersaults and most difficult feats in front of her altar, full of simple confidence that she would understand and be pleased. In one of the carols a shepherd sits, on Christmas night, watching his sheep and playing on his pipe. The star of Bethlehem and the angel warn him of the birth of Christ. He hurries off, leaving his dog instructions to keep his sheep from the corn, and finds the Child, to whom he says—

“Jesu, I offer to thee here my pipe,
My skirt, my tarbox, and my scrip ;
Home to my fellows now will I skip,
And also look unto my shepe.”

And having offered all he had, off he goes again, with a parting word to Mary and Joseph—

“Lull well Jesu in thy lap,
And farewell, Joseph, with thy round cap !”

Examples such as these will help us to understand why, when English people began to make and act plays, they choose what we call sacred subjects—that is, stories from the Bible or from the lives of the Saints ; but we can also see why the characters who appear in these plays are made to seem human and

friendly and not remote or terrifying. The characters in these stories lived far more vividly for the people of the Middle Ages than they do for us, partly because these people had far fewer other stories than we have, and had to depend very largely on what they were told in the way of stories by the people who could read, particularly by those who could read Latin, in which many stories were written. Most of them were likely to hear the stories which the monks taught children in their schools or told in the pulpits of their churches. Adam and Eve, Noah and the Ark, Abraham, St. Peter and the Apostles, Judas, Satan, Lazarus and Dives, all these and many others were familiar figures in their imagination.

The monks, anxious to make them still more living, encouraged their people to act the stories, at first in the churchyard, and afterwards in the market place or town hall, on the church festivals. The plays were called "mystery plays," and "miracle play," and as the acting of them grew more popular the setting or staging became more elaborate. Each craft or trade in the town would make itself responsible for one set of scenes or story. The carpenters, for instance, might choose to present the story of Noah and the Ark. They would make an ark which could be fitted on to a cart and drawn into the Square, where the actors would deliver their speeches and play out their parts. The speeches, also, became more formal, and instead of saying the words that came into his head, the actor had to get by heart the verses which were made for him by some man who was able to make poetry. Probably each craft was eager to outdo the others, and the plays which are still preserved show us what time and care

must have been spent on producing a play before an audience made up of critical friends and relations.

Some of the sacred stories seem to have been more popular than others, especially those where there was a chance of working in some amusing joke or odd character that might give the audience something to laugh at. Mrs. Noah, who was very shrewish and would not go into the ark when she ought to have done so, probably caused much laughter. The shepherd, Mak, who stole a sheep and hid it in a cradle while the other shepherds had gone to Bethlehem, is followed and made to admit that the curious bundle in the cradle, which he and his wife have sworn is their baby, is nothing of the sort. Herod, the wicked king, is always made to boast in the most intolerable fashion, and to utter long and furious ranting speeches, which may have amused some of the audience and frightened their children.

Some of the mystery plays are written in simple and awkward fashion, but some of them are full of beautiful passages, especially those which tell of the birth and death of Christ; and besides the longer speeches, there are also lovely songs which show how much easier it was becoming to use the English language musically.

There is another kind of play which shows how close was the tie between the Church and the early English drama—the Morality Play. Here, the characters were not drawn from sacred stories, but were the Vices and Virtues which men were taught to shun or to follow. Anger, Gluttony, Avarice, each represented by an actor, would appear on the stage uttering such speeches as we might expect from them and showing

clearly their ugliness and malice. Patience, Good Deeds, and Holiness would also appear and try, by their good advice, to win the hearts of men. The maker of a morality play had to invent his own plot in which Virtue had to conquer Vice and beat him off the stage. In the famous morality play, *Everyman*, which is still acted, the virtues and the vices struggle for the possession of the soul of man, and Everyman, who has lived carelessly without thinking of his soul, is nearly lost.

In the morality plays, as in the mystery and miracle plays, people felt the need of some humorous part to make them laugh. For a time the audience was satisfied with the thwacking of the devil when he was driven off the stage, but soon they wanted more than this, and a fashion grew up of giving them, between the scenes of the more serious plays, a rollicking scene or short play, which had nothing to do with the real play and was called an Interlude. The characters in the interlude were real men and women, such as might have lived in the very town or village where the plays were being acted, and the story was of some jest or trick which they might have played or suffered. The Church did not approve of these interludes, and some of them were not edifying, but by the end of the fifteenth century the Church was not as powerful as she had been, and people were less willing than they had been to accept her guidance in matters which were not matters of faith. (So the interlude makers persisted in making plays which did not deal with sacred people nor try to improve the morals of the audience, as the Church had meant them to do.) And it is a good thing for English literature that this should have happened, and that

drama should have been set free to choose its material unrestricted ; for otherwise we should have, not the great drama of Elizabethan days, but something much narrower and poorer. Out of the interludes came the desire to see on the stage plays which dealt with human beings, neither saints nor virtues, but men with natural human feelings which might bring them, by their own free will, to good or evil, to unhappiness or happiness.

Towards the end of the fifteenth century, as you know, printing came into use in England and the knowledge of many things which had been, as it were, locked up in manuscripts, stored in monasteries, and known only to wise men, was given to the ever increasing number of those who could read. The process of printing had been invented in Germany, and then improved in Italy, because of a great wave of zeal for learning which was sweeping over Europe. Men could not keep pace with the demand for knowledge by copying out books by hand, and so some way had to be devised by which books could be turned out in greater quantities, and printing was invented. In 1476, Caxton, who had learned the art abroad, set up his press at Westminster and prepared to print the first book ever printed in England.

England was one of the last of the European countries to begin printing. The foreign printing presses, especially those in Italy, had all begun by printing Latin books, either the Scriptures in Latin, or else the works of the great men who had lived and thought in Greece and Rome in ancient days. These works are called the classics, and as they had long been neglected in Europe, and were now in great demand, making versions or editions of the classics occupied all the

foreign printing presses. But Caxton printed *English* books, and so wisely did he choose that two of his printed books were perhaps the finest that had yet been written in the English language : Chaucer's *Canterbury Tales* and Malory's *Morte d'Arthur*, one of the greatest prose stories in the world.

So far we have had little to say about English prose. There were learned men in England in the twelfth and thirteenth centuries who wrote learned books, but they did not write in English, for few would have understood them, while on the other hand any educated person, were he Scot or Spaniard, might be expected to read and write Latin, though this Latin was not always of the most polished kind. By the middle of the fourteenth century men were more ready to use English, and a number of scholars inspired by Wycliffe set about making an English version of the whole of the Bible, a task which had never been attempted before. Another scholar, John of Trevisa, translated a Latin chronicle into English, and a knight, Sir John Mandeville, wrote a wonderful account of his wonderful travels which we need not believe but must certainly enjoy. But the greatest writer of English prose before the sixteenth century is undoubtedly Sir Thomas Malory.

There had been, both in England and France, from very early days, many tales of the great King Arthur and his knights. Whole romances had been written about Tristan, Gawaine, and Lancelot ; ballads also had been sung, and before Malory began to make his prose romance, people had begun to tire a little of the old stories. But so masterly was the way in which Malory selected the best parts of them and wove them into a

whole, so noble and vivid were the knights and ladies he told of, so high and generous his idea of true knightliness, so musical his language, that the story of Arthur has lived on in his book, and the *Morte d'Arthur* is counted one of the treasures of English literature. Many poets have drawn from Malory's prose tales which have inspired their finest poetry, but no such poem has ever surpassed the *Morte d'Arthur* in power and beauty. It is therefore better to read Malory's book before you read Tennyson's *Idylls of the King*, and to read it aloud, so that none of its music is lost. In it you will find stories of tournaments and perilous quests. There is Morgan le Fay, the enchantress, and Merlin, the wizard. There are false knights and traitors as well as true ones. There is the mysterious apparition of the Holy Grail and the story of the way in which knights, worthy and unworthy, were drawn to follow the quest. There you will read of Galahad, with his unearthly beauty, Arthur the great king, Modred the traitor, Gawaine laughing and jesting, and the tragic figures of Tristan and Iseult, of Lancelot and Guinevere.

Of Sir Thomas Malory little is known. It is thought that he belonged to Warwickshire, and we know that he died in 1471. He must certainly have seen England torn by the Wars of the Roses, and perhaps the cruel treachery of these wars made him long for the days of Arthur. After Malory's death there was no one to use English as he had used it. The times were not favourable for Literature, but when peace came, with the reign of Henry VII, there came too a time of preparation, and after that a great harvest of great books and great plays.

THE DAWN OF THE GREAT AGE.

IN the last years of the fifteenth century there arose, in England, a group of earnest, thoughtful men, who were grieved to see how little England seemed to care for learning, and how stupidly and carelessly Englishmen had been taught in the schools and universities which should have treated them more worthily. It was not that there were no means of better education. Oxford and Cambridge, founded in the twelfth century, had once made great scholars, and there were Grammar Schools all over the country. But these men felt that what was now taught there was not worth teaching, and would not fit men to take their part in life fully, nor to think carefully about the things worthy of their thought. They looked abroad to Italy and there they saw men burning with love for learning, and hating the ignorance which made men dull and stupid or prevented them from using, to the utmost, all the powers of their minds.

Italy, too, had had her dark days when civil wars had distracted her, and learning had been forgotten ; but when peace and wealth came to her city states there arose an ardent desire for knowledge, and especially for knowledge of the thoughts and wisdom of those races which were held to have given most to mankind—the Greeks and the Romans. It was not easy for the Italians to find the books which contained Greek or Latin wisdom. The handwritten copies of such books had not always been carefully kept, during the

many hundreds of years that had passed over Europe since they had been written. Men had not always prized them, and during the Middle Ages another kind of learning had been fashionable and the Greek and Roman books, which are called the classics, were neglected and even destroyed. But the Italians were determined to rediscover them. Scholars devoted their lives to searching throughout Europe for them, and they felt all the glowing triumph of an explorer when they rescued some long lost manuscript. England took no part in these discoveries ; she had as yet no missionary scholars.

So great was the admiration of European scholars for the Greek and Latin writers, who seemed to them to have discovered all truth and wisdom save that of the Scriptures, that whenever they themselves had anything learned or important to write, they wrote it, not in their own native language, but in Latin. If one learned man in Holland wished to write to his friend in Paris, he wrote not in Dutch but in Latin, even if he were only writing a friendly letter full of trifles. It seemed, then, as if this delight in the classics might have had an evil effect on native literatures since learned men did not use them, and left them to unlettered people. But it was the classics themselves that prevented this evil. One of the finest qualities of classical wisdom is its power of enlarging and strengthening the minds of those who study it, and of filling them with a vigour which makes them attempt new things in a new way. Thus every country which took part in this renewed delight in learning, which is called the Renaissance, began by imitating the form and language of the masterpieces of Greece and Rome, and each ended by making

a great national art of her own, expressing in her own literature, architecture, painting, or scientific discovery, herself and the spirit of her own time.

The spirit of the time was an adventurous one. Men's minds were alert and eager to know the causes of many things which the Middle Ages had taken for granted. In all directions great enterprises were undertaken and were successful. The energy and excitement which led some men to discover new lands and new seas, led others to new realms of thought and language.

Long after southern Europe had enjoyed the fruits of the Renaissance, England remained cold and unawakened, deep in the ruts of the old-fashioned learning which now seemed to more thoughtful men quite useless. It seemed natural, then, that men who cared for her should look to Italy for light and go there in search of it. So, in the reign of Henry VII, Colet, Grocyn, Linacre and other wise men set out for Italy to learn Latin and Greek there, and to bring back to England that new spirit of eager inquiry which the study of the classics had given to Italy. Through their efforts England became again the home of learned men. The classics were taught at the universities and in the houses of the noblemen. The royal children were brought up in the new learning and were educated after the fashion of the Renaissance gentleman who was expected to be not only a classical scholar, but to combine the qualities of a poet and a musician, a statesman and a soldier, and to be, above all, courteous in manner and graceful in appearance. When one of these princes became King Henry VIII the cause of learning was greatly helped, and Henry was anxious to outshine

his rival, Francis I, and invited to his Court men who were scholars, painters, or men of letters. Music and poetry became the fashion of the day, and the King loved gaily-dressed processions and the visits of foreign lords and revelry.

All this time the people went on enjoying their own plays, especially the interludes. In the universities plays were made in Latin and Greek after the model of the ancient plays, and were acted by the undergraduates and praised by scholars; but they did not take the place of English plays, and one of the most famous writers of interludes was a learned man and a schoolmaster.

Apart from these plays and the ballads there was little poetry in England during the fifteenth century, and when the courtiers of Henry wanted to make new songs and poems they did not always use English models. It had become the fashion for young English gentlemen to visit Italy and enjoy the life of her luxurious cities where music and poetry reigned. They brought back with them some of the Italian poems which they most admired, and translated them into their own language and made others like them. One of the favourite forms of Italian poetry was the sonnet, a poem of fourteen lines very strictly arranged as to rhyme. Translating sonnets into English was very good practice in verse-making, and sonnets became very much the fashion at Court, where they had been introduced by Sir Thomas Wyatt.

France also had a flourishing school of poets, and French poems were translated and imitated by English poets who did not rest content until they had mastered their forms and could suit them to English words.

Soon they began to learn how musical their own language might be made, and to invent new measures for it and make new poetry. Music that had not been heard since Chaucer's day began to sound in English poetry, and formed a fitting prelude for fuller notes and surer melodies soon to come after.

In prose, too, men realized that English could be used clearly and powerfully. Sir Thomas More wrote his description of an ideal state in Latin, perhaps to please his scholar friend, Erasmus, but he could also use his own language with good effect. Lord Berners showed still greater mastery in his translation of the work of the French chronicler, Froissart. Sir Thomas Elyot wrote in English his idea of the best education for an English gentleman. He could have written his book, he tells us, more easily if he had written in Latin, but he thought it right to use his native language. Ascham, who was tutor to Princess Elizabeth and a great upholder of the wisdom of the classics, wrote in English for Englishmen, and Englishmen were growing proud of their language.

The use of English was very much increased by the great events which occupied the later years of Henry's reign—the quarrel with Rome and the English Reformation.

John. | The Renaissance had taught men to inquire into the reason of things—to inquire, if possible, for themselves—rather than to accept the beliefs of other people without testing them. They were now no longer content to be taught their religion by word of mouth, they wished to be able to read for themselves those books on which their religion was founded, and judge for themselves matters which had formerly been decided for them by

others. They wished to have the Bible printed in English so that every one who could read might find there his own beliefs. At first King Henry put down such would-be reformers with a heavy hand, and the first New Testament to be printed in English had to be printed secretly in Germany by Tindale and copies smuggled into England. Later on, however, Henry sought the support of the people in his quarrel with Rome, and his divines, Latimer and Cranmer, preached to the people and wrote for them in vigorous English. To Cranmer was given the task of translating into his native language the Latin prayers which had long been used in England. Church services, hitherto in Latin, were now performed in English, and in the reign of Edward VI the Book of Common Prayer made it clear to all that, in dignity and beauty, the English language need fear no rival. All Englishmen could, if they chose, hear, daily, great thoughts uttered in great language. There is no doubt that the sound of it lingered in their ears when, at length, they began to write in English prose their own thoughts and feelings.

CHAPTER V.

THE GREAT ELIZABETHAN AGE.

I.

Most people look on the age of Elizabeth as the greatest age in all English literature. Never at any other time were there so many powerful playwrights, so many poets of rare quality, never was so much wit and so much music crowded into so small a space. It is true that when Elizabeth died, in 1603, some of the most famous of the Elizabethans were still young and had not yet done their finest work, but in spirit they belonged to the great days of Elizabeth, in which they found their inspiration.

In no other age were the men of letters so masterly in their grip—so well able to turn their pens to every sort of literature—to write prose and verse with equal grandeur, to make tremendous plays and delicate songs, tales in prose, tales in verse, sonnets, satires, and poems of love and praise. Life was thrilling in their time. England had come safely out of civil wars and foreign invasion, and was exulting in her victory. Englishmen were fired with pride in their country and their queen, and as they marched triumphant before the eyes of other nations, so their men of letters marched triumphant through all the fields of literature, invading them with magnificent confidence. Great in almost everything, they were perhaps at the greatest in poetry and drama, and in Spenser and Shakespeare we can see their highest quality.

From the very beginning of her reign Elizabeth made it clear that her Court was to be gay and brilliant. She loved to dance and to hear music and song, to be present at plays and pageants staged and acted by her courtiers, to visit her subjects and be entertained by them. But although the young gentlemen of her Court were anxious to please her, and praise her in glowing verse, they were not, at first, very successful as poets. They could turn a sonnet or translate a song and there was much verse writing, but little poetry. Men like Sir Philip Sidney, who was himself a poet, began to look anxiously about



EDMUND SPENSER.

for the arrival of some real poet, who would rescue England from her poetless condition. And then, in 1579, came Edmund Spenser, with the *Shepheardes Calendar* and people at once knew that the longed-for new poet had come.

Spenser was born in London and was sent to school there before proceeding to Cambridge University. At Cambridge he found great delight in studying Greek and in the friendship of young men who, like himself, loved poetry. Like them, he translated foreign

poetry into English verse, trying over various measures till he found the most musical; but he also studied his own native literature and especially Chaucer's works, and Chaucer, he tells us, taught him how to sing. It was fortunate that Spenser loved his Chaucer, for some of his learned friends tried to persuade him that English verse should imitate as closely as possible the exact metres of classical poetry. But Spenser, because he could feel the music of Chaucer's poetry, soon realized that it was foolish to try to make English poetry that was not truly English, and he used the metres Chaucer had used and added others of his own invention, proving to everyone his mastery over metre.

Spenser's first great poem, the *Shepherd's Calendar*, is made up of twelve poems, one for each month of the year. Each poem gives us a picture of country life and the talk of shepherds. Spenser borrowed this kind of poetry from Greek and Latin poets who called their shepherd-poems eclogues or idylls. With Spenser, as with the poets whom he followed, the shepherds whom he describes are sometimes really poets; sometimes Spenser himself, disguised as a shepherd, tells us about his own love story or even discusses matters which were troubling Elizabethan statesmen, but could not have been of much interest to rustic shepherds. In some of these eclogues we hear of the false or hireling shepherds, and by these Spenser means the worldly, careless clergy of his time who neglected their flocks to run after riches. Sometimes we hear of the lack of poets, but more often we hear the praises of the matchless Eliza, the great queen, whom the Elizabethan poets could never tire of praising. In some of the eclogues the shepherds are more like real shepherds;

they have their games and contests in which a prize is given to the singer of the best song.

Great was the interest of men in the subject matter of the *Shepheardes Calendar*, and greater still was their admiration of its varied music. "Here at last," they said, "is a man who can make whatever he touches give back music." And this is one of Spenser's greatest gifts—his power of distilling out of words and rhythms, beauty and sweet sound. He uses many different metres, and in none of them is there harshness or awkwardness.

The praise given to "the new poet" encouraged him to pursue the great plans he carried in his head. One of the marks of the men of this Renaissance age was the grand scale on which they planned, whether they were bent on planning a drama, a poem, or a voyage of discovery. And even if they knew that the splendid schemes of discovery they were dreaming of would have to be carried out in a tiny ship with a handful of men, that did not prevent their imaginations from making magnificent plans on a magnificent scale. And so Spenser planned his epic poem, the *Faerie Queene*, like an architect building a spacious palace. It was to consist of twelve books; each book was to contain twelve cantos, and it was to treat of the highest subject—the virtues that lead men to perfection. Each of these virtues was to be represented by a knight or a noble lady who was to ride through Fairyland, and to fight with the forces of evil, with witches and magicians, false knights and cruel ladies who set snares for their ruin. The Fairy Queen was Elizabeth herself, that "most glorious and excellent lady" Spenser calls her, and it seemed natural to him to

make her enemies appear in his poem as the embodiments of evil. Everyone who read the *Faerie Queene* in Spenser's day knew quite well that Archimago, the wicked magician, who stood for Deceit, was also meant to be the Pope, and that Duessa, a foul witch, was a picture, not only of Falsehood, but also of Elizabeth's unfortunate rival, Mary, Queen of Scots. Many of these readers, no doubt, rejoiced over the savage and ugly descriptions of Elizabeth's enemies, but to-day most of us are sorry that Spenser should have allowed them to disfigure his poem.

Spenser never succeeded in finishing the great work he had planned. Three books of the *Faerie Queene* were published in 1590, and six years later there were three more ready, but the misfortunes that fell thick and heavy on the poet prevented him from ending the task he had set himself. In spite of the fame he had won as a poet, Spenser seems to have found life disappointing. He had powerful friends and the favour of the queen herself, but he had to spend the best years of his life away from the society of men who loved literature and practised it, and act as secretary to the English Governor of Ireland. His exile was made more bitter by the terrible state of affairs in Ireland, where rebellions against the English might break out at any moment. Some of his friends came to visit him. One, Sir Walter Raleigh, came, his head full of dreams of founding colonies in the New World, and he may have heard the poet reading from the first three books of his *Faerie Queene* which he was about to take over to England to publish there. His greatest friend, Sir Philip Sidney, most loved and admired of all the brilliant men of Elizabeth's Court,

who had taken Spenser to live in his house, died when the poet was in Ireland, and his death was a great sorrow to Spenser and to all England. And then, in 1598, came another rebellion in southern Ireland, and the Desmonds, whose castle he had occupied, seized his home, plundered and burnt it, so that Spenser and his wife and children were barely able to escape, and the youngest child, it is said, was burnt to death in the blazing castle. A few months later Spenser died, poor and unhappy, in London.

But the *Faerie Queene* keeps his name alive, and unfinished though it is, enough remains to show his greatness. The poem is a storehouse of beautiful things—stories of adventure, descriptions of beautiful scenes, brave and gentle knights and loyal women.

In Book I we see the Red Cross Knight riding out on a quest given to him by the Fairy Queen. He is Holiness, and with him goes a lady, Una (Truth), whose royal parents the knight is to rescue from their enemies. The knight and the lady and their attendant dwarf turn aside from their path, and come to the den of Error. Error is a foul dragon-beast, who lies suckling her poisonous young. As soon as she sees the Red Cross Knight she rushes against him, and he is nearly overcome, until, listening to Una's advice, he manages to strangle her. Next they meet a venerable looking old hermit who offers to shelter them at his hermitage. He is really Archimago, the wicked enchanter, and when the Red Cross Knight and Una sleep he sends them evil visions, and the Red Cross Knight is angry with Una and deserts her. Separated from Una, he meets with Duessa, who is Falsehood, and is led into many dangers. Una, left alone, is

befriended by a lion who wards off all evil-doers. After many trials, Una and her knight meet again and accomplish their quest.

The second book tells of Sir Guyon, the knight of Temperance, the third of Britomart, who is Chastity. The other books describe the virtues of Friendship, Justice and Courtesy.

The *Faerie Queene* is the first of the great Elizabethan poems ; it is also, at the same time, the first and finest fruit of that Renaissance which came to England from Italy. Spenser never travelled in Italy as some of his friends had done, but he knew the spirit of Italy from his study of her poetry, and he knew also the writings of those Greek and Latin authors who had inspired Italy's Renaissance. Like the men of the Italian Renaissance, Spenser revelled in all beautiful things that can be seen and heard, and he worshipped, too, beauty of a more spiritual nature. This we see clearly in the *Faerie Queene*, but we see also something which was perhaps peculiarly English, something grave and sober in spirit which made him deeply concerned about right doing, and very stern over wrong doing. In spite of his love of learning and of beauty, Spenser did not value either of them as highly as virtue. He had seen at Court handsome and learned men who were not to be trusted, and he heartily despised the vain, foolish life of courtiers, graceful and polished outwardly but, inwardly, cowardly hangers-on. He knew that men made use of religion as a cloak to hide their own dark designs, and he hated hypocrites and schemers. And this, too, can be seen in the *Faerie Queene*.

It can also be seen in a shorter poem which Spenser

wrote, called *Mother Hubbard's Tale*. Here we see the cunning Fox and the greedy Ape setting out to seek their fortunes by tricking and robbing everyone they meet. At last they arrive at the court of King Lion. Here they are very successful, for the courtiers are vain and foolish and easily deceived. Spenser is here drawing a picture of the darker side of Elizabeth's Court, and the evil effect of the Court life on all but the nobler spirits; and in this poem are the famous lines which tell of the misery and agony of mind endured by the poor suitor who, like Spenser himself, had to waste long days suing hopelessly to secure some favour.

Some of his short poems are happier in mood. One of them, a song in honour of the marriage of two noble ladies, is called *Prothalamium*, and in it we hear of the "silver streaming Themmes" and "mery London," Spenser's "kyndly nurse." Four hymns he wrote in honour of Beauty, and these show very clearly how Spenser loved the wisdom of Greece. He also wrote sadder pieces; one of them laments the death of Sir Philip Sidney, and some lament the evils of his own day. Like most of the other Elizabethan poets, Spenser used the sonnet form, but he liked best, perhaps, the nine-line stanza, which he made for his *Faerie Queene*, and from which he drew all kinds of music.

Spenser is sometimes called "the poet's poet," and certainly, since his day, there have been few great English poets who have not loved to read his works; he seems to have inspired men to sing, for no sooner had he given his poetry to the world than there sprang up a group of men, each in his own fashion, to carry aloft the light of poetry that Spenser had lit for them.

Marlowe, Shakespeare, Drayton, and Daniel are the greatest and best known of these poets ; but there were many others who could write exquisite songs to be set to music.

There was never a time in England when so many people could write such beautiful songs ; and indeed the whole people loved music and song. Every



CLAVICYTHERIUM,
SIXTEENTH
CENTURY.

Elizabethan gentleman, it was felt, ought to be able to play one instrument and join in singing at sight, or people would begin to ask where he could possibly have been brought up. Song books were printed containing lovely songs, marked by that simplicity and "full-throated ease" which distinguishes Elizabethan songs from those of a later time. Songs were scattered throughout plays or put into prose stories, and some of them we might have lost altogether but for the care of nineteenth century scholars, who collected them from out-of-the-way places. England was certainly full of poetry and honoured her poets, and was honoured by them.

Much as the Queen loved to hear poetry, she, like her subjects, seems to have loved plays still more. Perhaps her love of excitement and adventure, which she shared with her people, found in the passion and activity of the players on their stages something more satisfying than the poets' verses could give. The stage was more popular than it had ever been. Everybody clamoured for plays and there were plays to suit the taste of all. It was fortunate for the makers of

plays, and the actors in them, that the Court led this taste for the performance of plays; for there was always a section of the people who did not approve of plays or of play-acting, and thought that they did more harm than good. These people, some of whom were called Puritans, were troubled at the growing demand for plays, and still more plays, and they did their best to check it, but they were helpless against the rising tide. The old days of the mystery and morality plays were over, and men had arisen who could make plays so full of human interest and excitement that nothing could prevent people from going to see them acted. Grave university authorities forbade the troupes of strolling players to come within a certain distance of their colleges; they encouraged their undergraduates to act in the solemn Greek and Latin plays written by learned men; but they could not prevent them from preferring the more lively and stirring pieces that the strolling players produced in any barn they managed to hire. Indeed, it was by young men who had been students at Oxford or Cambridge that the first great Elizabethan plays were made.

Gradually the courtyards of the inns in which plays were performed were found to be too small for their audiences and theatres were built specially for plays. But London magistrates would not allow theatres to be built within the city boundaries, so they were built either in north-east of the city or across the river on the south side of the Thames. Here the audience flocked, the gallants crossing the river in little wherries rowed by the famous Thames watermen, the citizens jostling each other across London Bridge with its shops and houses.

The Elizabethan public theatre was much smaller and simpler than ours. There was not much attempt at elaborate scenery, though the costumes worn by the actors were often brave and costly. In some theatres there was no roof and the rain and the sun could beat down on the pit where the people stood, unless some



AN ELIZABETHAN THEATRE.

awning was arranged to keep them comfortable. Stools were set at either side on the stage and the gallants liked to buy the right to sit there for sixpence. Rushes were strewn on the stage, which was sometimes two tiers high, the second tier serving as an upper room or balcony if the play required it. On this simple stage magnificent plays were acted by great actors who could move their audience at will. No women were allowed to act. Their places were taken by young men, and sometimes a play was acted throughout by a band of highly-trained children who could play all parts, even those of old men. Often the queen would desire to have a play acted at Court, and she had an officer, called the Master of Revels, whose business it was to prepare the performance. At first, plays which were made to be acted at Court differed from those the people liked to see best. We can see this difference in the plays written by John

Lyly, who was always hoping to be made Master of Revels. His plays are written in prose of a polished and highly affected kind, full of wit and fine fancies, and much admired by Court ladies, who liked to hear and speak this curious language which was called Euphuism. The plots of his plays are taken from old Greek stories. We are not much interested in the characters in spite of their brilliant talk, and they must have seemed bloodless and unreal to people who liked to hear "sound and fury" on the stage, and see thrilling deeds and listen to fiery eloquence.

Far more to their taste were the plays of Kyd and Marlowe. Both these men had studied the ancient plays of Greece and Rome, but when they came to make plays in English they did not feel bound to obey the rules which were believed to have governed the old classic plays. In Greek plays, though we hear of violent deeds and of bloodshed, we are hardly ever shown such deeds on the stage; they were not considered fit things to offer to the eyes of the audience; but Kyd and Marlowe and the playwrights who followed them showed men, hanged, or stabbed, or tortured on the stage, to the great delight of most of the audience, who loved to be thrilled with horror. In classical plays, we are not asked to imagine such rapid changes of scene, or such long intervals of time between the scenes as the Elizabethan playwrights ask us to imagine. We are not taken from Rome to Athens and back again in the twinkling of an eye in the classical plays, nor does the hero appear in one scene as an infant, and a quarter of an hour later as a grown-up man. The Elizabethans made what demands they thought good on the imagination of their audiences and carried them

backwards and forwards to France or Italy, leaping over the space of many years in one or two acts, and crowding into others deeds that would take much longer to do in real life.

Their audience did not complain. They loved the excitement of seeing violent deeds performed on the stage and hearing the "great and thundering speech" that accompanied them. They did not complain if the hero or villain of the play were grander or more terrible than human creatures could possibly be. They watched with special delight the plays of Marlowe, the greatest playmaker before Shakespeare. In all Marlowe's plays, with one exception, the chief figure in the play is moved by some overpowering passion, such as ambition or hatred, to perform deeds of a superhuman and monstrous kind.)

In the most famous of Marlowe's plays, *Dr. Faustus*, the chief figure is a student who has given himself up to learning, and has studied so deeply that he has mastered all human knowledge. Urged on by restless pride and the desire to surpass mankind, he calls up the evil spirit, Mephistophilis, and with blood from his own arm signs a deed which gives his soul to the devil. On his part, Mephistophilis promises to be obedient to Faustus for twenty-four years, and do whatever he commands him; but at the end of that time, he is to carry Faustus bodily to hell. Marlowe shows us Faustus passing over Europe. He is more powerful than the Pope or the Emperor whose Courts he visits. He can work marvels beyond the powers of man, for he knows the secrets of Nature and can call up the spirits of the dead. But in spite of his triumph, remorse visits him and the thought of the price he will

have to pay. When the last night comes he is tortured with fear. He calls, too late, on Christ to save him, and fierce devils carry him down to hell.

You can imagine how exciting such a play could be, especially if there were plenty of the high-sounding speeches for which Marlowe was famous. But there were some wise people who witnessed Marlowe's plays and realized that, in spite of their tremendous heroes and their many passages of beautiful poetry, the plays were not quite true to nature or to art. It is generally much easier to give an exaggerated account or description than to give a true one. It is easier to make a story in which the villain is so thoroughly evil that he ceases to have any human qualities left, than to make a story in which the villain does evil deeds, and yet remains recognizably a man like other men. It is easy to make a character in a play so perfect that he has no human flaws ; it is harder to make a very good man who is not without weaknesses. But if it is harder to do, it is more interesting to attempt, and the result is something, at the same time, more lifelike and more artistic. You will see this very clearly if you read Marlowe's *Jew of Malta* and then turn to Shakespeare's *Merchant of Venice*. You will see that Marlowe has made his Jew entirely without human feeling, whereas Shakespeare has shown his Jew of Venice full of malice, yet subject to natural feelings.

Marlowe himself seems to have become aware of his own defects, for in his last play, *Edward II*, the chief figure is a weak, human king, and there is much less exaggeration and few ranting speeches. It is possible that his friendship with Shakespeare, then a young man of his own age, but not yet nearly as famous, may have

had some influence on his last work ; and there is no doubt that a very great dramatist was lost to us when Marlowe was killed in some angry quarrel in a tavern near London, in his thirtieth year.

When Marlowe died, in 1593, Shakespeare had already spent seven years in London, learning and practising his art at the London theatres. During these years he had played many parts on the stage ; he had taken a hand at altering other men's plays ; he had added scenes to others ; and he was just beginning to draw the eyes of all men to him by his first plays, *Love's Labour's Lost*, *Two Gentlemen of Verona*, and, most popular of the early plays, *Romeo and Juliet*. A few months before Marlowe's death he had published his first long poem, *Venus and Adonis*, whose beauty had been quickly recognized by the poetry-loving Elizabethans as surpassing all others of its kind.

Success such as this must have been very encouraging to one who had found life in his native Stratford-on-Avon narrow and disappointing, and had come up to London full of high hopes, with few friends and little influence.

Shakespeare's father, a man of importance in Stratford, had sent his son to Stratford Grammar School, where he might have his share in the new learning, and learn to read those Latin and Greek authors which were now as highly prized in Renaissance England as they had been in Italy. Here Shakespeare learnt to read Ovid and Plautus and he turned to these works later, when he began to write poetry. He would also be expected to read and write English, but schoolmasters in those days took a knowledge of English for granted and spent almost all their time teaching

their boys Latin, and, if they were promising, a little Greek.

Shakespeare had to leave school when he was thirteen, to try to help his father's business, which was not nearly as prosperous as it had been. His holidays were spent in the rich Warwickshire countryside, and we know from his

poetry how familiar he was with the sights and sounds of the country, and how keen an interest he took in country sports.

The story goes that his high spirits made him one of a band of young men who stole deer in the park of Sir Thomas Lucy of



SHAKESPEARE.

Charlcote, near Stratford. He was caught and had to appear before the knight, who punished him; but Shakespeare took his revenge later on, when, in his play, *The Merry Wives of Windsor*, he made fun of his judge by making him appear as Justice Shallow.

Another source of pleasure must have been the visits of the travelling players who came almost every year to Stratford and gave their performances before the delighted citizens, who used to take their children, the small boys standing between the legs of their fathers who sat on the benches watching the players.

Shakespeare married when he was eighteen years old

but he could not settle down in Stratford. Perhaps his deer-stealing habits made life difficult; more probably the fascination of the travelling players made him restless, and drew him to look towards London with longing eyes. London held promise of fame and fortune, of the favour of the queen, who was always eager to hear of the success of her subjects and to command them to appear before her royal presence. Feeling that he had power in him and ready to try his fortune, Shakespeare left Stratford, probably on foot, and made his way through Oxford to London, arriving there, it is thought, in 1586. Here, as we know, he worked for the London stage with such energy and success that, when Marlowe died, people looked to Shakespeare to take his place and other playwrights, jealous of his popularity, called him "an upstart crow" in borrowed feathers.

For more than twenty years Shakespeare worked with that extraordinary energy which was one of the signs of his genius. In that time he wrote and had staged more than thirty plays, not counting those plays on which he is thought to have worked with other dramatists. Of these plays, some were comedies, plays of a happy nature ending in gaiety and laughter; some were tragedies, plays which show the downfall of human happiness and end in gloom; some were history plays and followed the fortunes of an English or a Roman hero. But Shakespeare believed that the greatest plays are those which show life as we know it, and since in life happiness and unhappiness are not always quite separate but often closely joined, he did not keep them apart in his plays. So in Shakespeare's comedies we find people who suffer

tragically and in his tragedies there is often laughter. Some of his plays are called tragi-comedies because, although they do not end in unhappiness, the characters in them come very near to disaster and ruin.

We must think of Shakespeare as the master of a swift, vigorous intellect which played over human nature as a powerful searchlight plays over a dark space and lights up its deepest shadows. To this power was added the power of construction, of choosing the material for his play, of shaping it and making it grow under his hands till it took the form he desired for it. And even these gifts, magnificent though they were, would not have made him supreme, had he not also possessed that mastery over language which made it possible to force into language, clear, lovely and subtle, thoughts and feelings which are dimly known by other men but mock their efforts to utter them.

Shakespeare's command of language never fails him, whether he is making his high-spirited Court ladies tease the quick wits of their lovers, or the country pedlar cry his wares to village girls. (When tragedy rises to its height the language of the play grows more impassioned; each line carries its mighty burden of sound and stirs the imagination of the listener.) You will see this clearly in the four great tragedies, *Hamlet*, *Othello*, *Macbeth*, and *King Lear*, all written within a short space of time when Shakespeare, with all his great powers fully matured, turned to the study of tragic themes and produced the greatest tragedies in the language. Not only in tragedies, but in each of the plays you will find speeches striking in their power and their appropriateness to the characters who utter them, and you will find in the number and

variety of these characters fresh proof of their creator's genius.

Whole books have been written in praise of Shakespeare's characters, but the only way to know them is to read the plays. *Midsummer Night's Dream*, *As You Like It*, and *Twelfth Night* will give you some insight into the delicious humour and tenderness of Shakespeare's comedies, the romantic heroes and heroines, the witty fool Touchstone, Bully Bottom and his friends, and all those other dwellers in the Forest of Arden, the enchanted Athenian wood, or the Court of Illyria. In these plays Shakespeare uses prose and poetry with equal grace, and gay and delicate songs add to the charm of the comedies.

Richard II, *Henry IV*, and *Henry V* show us Shakespeare's mind working on the records of English history as they were preserved by Holinshed. He shows us kings, not different in their nature from other men, but set apart from them by fate and their office of kingship. We see also nobles, courtiers, and hangers-on, leaders of armies and camp-followers, each busied with his own concerns and each revealing the penetration of his maker. In Falstaff and in Richard, the King, we have instances of the range of his art. *Julius Cæsar* enacts a tragedy drawn from Roman history and was followed by the four great tragedies already mentioned. Of these you may find *Macbeth* the best to read first. It is a terrible tragedy, in which ambition preys on the mind of Macbeth and his wife and excites them to murder their king. But although they share in the crime, their natures are different and remorse, when it comes, acts differently on each of them. Macbeth grows reckless in crime ;

Lady Macbeth, tortured by her conscience, walks in her sleep, talking of the murder and trying to wash from her hands the fancied stain of blood. You will notice that the chief figures, in Shakespeare's tragedies change or develop in character as the plays go on. The tragic events in which they take part do not pass lightly over their heads and leave no trace behind them. They are altered by their suffering, new qualities appear in them, either for good or for evil. In lesser dramatists we do not find this alteration, but we do in life. In *King Lear* we see the hasty, passionate king tortured into madness and sinking into broken old age and dotage. In *Othello* we see a noble nature changed by jealousy, and in *Hamlet* we have a character study of the highest and subtlest kind, the ruin of a sensitive, fastidious nature struggling against too heavy odds.

In *The Tempest*, almost the last of Shakespeare's plays, there is no tragedy. The scene is an enchanted island where Prospero, exiled from his kingdom, works his magic spells and watches over his daughter, Miranda. Caliban, half man and half monster, must have been a great delight to Elizabethans who had heard strange tales from travellers in the New Indies and America about the cannibals and devil-worshippers who lived there. The Elizabethans were noted for their love of seeing marvellous sights and must have welcomed the appearance of so strange a creature on the stage; but Shakespeare, as you will realize, was interested in the mind of Caliban and makes us see that even he had thought and feeling to express.

It is interesting to know that Shakespeare did not invent his own plots. In almost every case he made

use of stories which had already been used by some other writer.) He himself was never in Italy; indeed, it is probable that he was never outside England, yet in many cases Italy is the scene of the play. The reason for his choice of scene is a simple one. He borrowed both the story and its setting from one of the Italian novels which were then exceedingly popular in London. Anyone who could read Italian or had an English translation could have read for himself the story of *Romeo and Juliet*, *Twelfth Night*, or *Othello*, before Shakespeare made them into English plays. For the plots of his English history plays he had the English chronicles to work on, and for the Roman ones, he had the famous translation of Plutarch, which had been made not long before by Sir Thomas North. Plays telling the story of Hamlet and of King Lear had already appeared on the London stage before Shakespeare produced his versions, and occasionally he borrowed a plot from romances written by English writers whom he knew.

There was nothing unusual in this borrowing. In those days plots were felt to be common property for all to use. (The greater the dramatist, the better his version would be. The dramatists themselves were often very careless about their rights. Sometimes the writer of the play could copy it out in his own handwriting or get a professional scribe to do it.) He would then sell his copy to the company of players who were to act it and, if the censor of plays had passed it, it was put on the stage. But the maker of it does not seem to have had any further claim to it. The new owner might have it printed and published if he thought it worth while, but the author would not be asked to

correct the proofs, nor consulted about mistakes which had slipped into the text. Even Shakespeare, who had his own company of players, never troubled to collect all his plays and have them properly published. Some of them were printed during his lifetime, but more than half were never published till seven years after his death, in 1616. Then two of his friends, Heming and Condell, collected the plays and published what is known as the First Folio Edition. A copy of this edition is still preserved and can be seen by anyone who visits Shakespeare's house in Stratford-on-Avon.



BEN JONSON.

Even in his own day, Shakespeare was looked on as the greatest of all the playwrights, although there were many dramatists in his time who were worthy of high praise, such as Ben Jonson, Beaumont and Fletcher, Chapman, Dekker, Webster and many others. He was frequently commanded to bring his plays to Court, where they were praised by the queen and the great nobles, amongst whom Shakespeare had several special friends.

When Elizabeth died, in 1603, he lost none of his popularity. James I loved plays, and Shakespeare was still the leading playwright. Unlike other playwrights, Shakespeare did not live riotously, nor did he join in their brawls and jealous quarrels. He worked at his profession and had a share in the profits of the Globe Theatre, where his plays were oftenest produced. Almost all our records go to prove that he was a sweet-tempered man, full of gay wit and kindness. He was generous to those who asked his help, and when he returned to Stratford, in 1611, he had many friends to make him happy.

Though we have a good deal of knowledge concerning Shakespeare's career we know little of his interior life, for the dramatist need not reveal himself in his work, as other authors do. Some people find in the many sonnets which Shakespeare wrote a revelation of the poet's own unhappy experiences, but we cannot be certain that they are justified in their opinion, and we can enjoy the sonnets for their own sake.

II.

Elizabethan dramatists used either prose or poetry in their plays just as they thought best, but there were also a great many other men who had discovered how to write English prose, and how to use it for many new purposes. Some of the earlier Elizabethan writers were so pleased with their power of writing prose that they added many strange flourishes and affectations, and produced an odd and artificial style of writing which was called Euphuism. Largely through the comedies of Lyly and his moral story, *Euphues*, Euphuism became very fashionable. Nearly all the

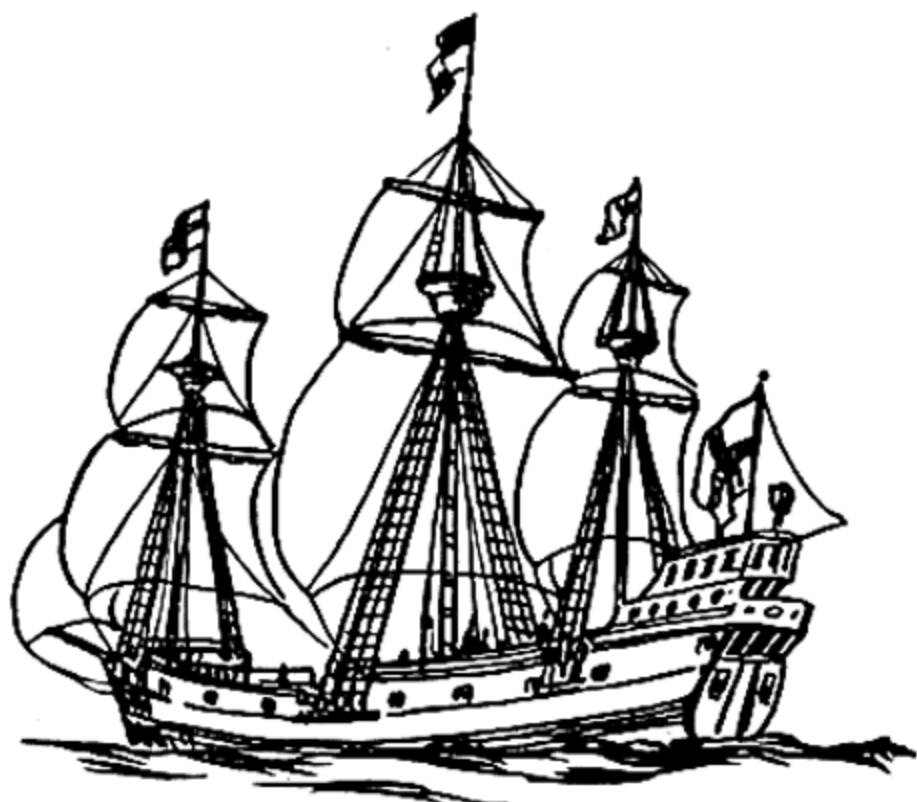
brilliant prose writers of the next few years began by imitating the style of Euphuës, though they were very fond of ridiculing it when they grew older. Shakespeare often used it in his earliest plays, but he makes Falstaff, in *Henry IV*, poke fun at it.

Euphuism died out and in its place came the grand style of prose which rose to its highest in the hands of Hooker, Shakespeare, the translator of Plutarch, and the translators of the authorized version of the Bible. Prose such as these men wrote is as impressive as great poetry. It has colour and dignity, and can express the considered judgments of learned men and the depths of human feelings.

Not all Elizabethan prose moved on such rare heights, but there were certainly more men in London who could write good prose than there had ever been before. The printing presses, and the cry of the people for books to read had brought into being a new race of men of letters who were eager to coin their wits into money. In older days the Church or the noblemen had provided the learned author with his living, and he had lived under their roof. Now the young men of promise flocked to London to enter on the desperate struggle of earning a living by their pens. They wrote romantic tales of love and adventure, they made plays for the stage, they translated Italian and French books, and wrote little books called pamphlets to support or condemn some popular question. One of the most interesting of them is Robert Greene, a university scholar, who had travelled in Italy and got no good there. Greene wrote prose tales and plays and would have been a successful man, but his evil habits led him to seek the society of the lowest thieves and rascals

Prose
Style

in London. With them he learnt all kinds of evil, especially the tricks by which they robbed and cheated foolish, honest people. Suddenly he repented, and to the terror and anger of all the London thieves he wrote five pamphlets in which he revealed all their tricks. These pamphlets are of interest to us for this reason. Before Greene described the life of the London streets,



AN ELIZABETHAN VESSEL.

and of the people he actually saw there, no one in England had seen that here was very good material for prose literature. The romances of the day dealt with the affairs of lords and ladies, or of princesses and shepherdesses in some far-off, imaginary world. They neglected the world that lay at their hand. But after Greene, and even during his lifetime, this world made its appearance in literature, in the prose of Nashe, Dekker, and Deloney, and in the plays of Ben Jonson and others.

Besides journalist prose writers like Greene, there were other more serious and responsible citizens who entered on the business of writing because they wished to serve their country. One of these was a London tailor, John Stow. So keen was his pride in his native city that he devoted his time to collecting records of her and writing her history, which he called *A Survey of the Cities of London and Westminster*, a book of value to those who would like to see a picture of London in Elizabeth's reign.

More famous still is the work of Richard Hakluyt. Hakluyt, while still at school, found lying open, in his cousin's room, one of the new maps which had lately been drawn to show the New World and the seas which divided it from Europe. Across these seas, ship after ship, manned by Englishmen, was then ploughing its difficult way ; and in the riverside streets of London weather-beaten sailors were telling their wonderful stories of the riches and the perils of the New World. Drake, Hawkins, and Frobisher were soon to lead their expeditions across the Atlantic in search of treasure and new lands, and the daring deeds of Elizabethan seamen were told in many lands. When Hakluyt grew up, it became his chief desire to collect and preserve the records of such adventurous voyages. Sometimes he was able to obtain the ship's log book, or the account of the voyage made by a secretary



SHOP OF THE
PERIOD.

who accompanied some great sea-captain; sometimes he took down his story from the lips of some returned sailor whom he met on the quayside. He collected also the records of much earlier travels, searching for his materials in many out-of-the-way corners, so that in his great work, *The Principal Navigations*, we can read tales of adventures from the early days to the days of the Great Armada.

There were other men who used their pens on one or other side of the religious quarrel which raged in Elizabeth's reign. Often their writings were bitter and furious. They did not try to argue with their enemies, they were content to denounce them in savage fashion. But the greatest of them, Richard Hooker, was a man of very different nature. Learned, honourable and single-minded, he was entrusted with the heavy task of defending the English Church and her way of governing herself. Always calm and reasonable, broad-minded and lofty, his defence rises above the level of mere party disputes and is one of the greatest prose works of this great age.

CHAPTER VI.

CAVALIERS AND PURITANS.

THE coming of the new king, James I, made little difference to the men of letters. Poets, playmakers and prose writers went on with their work just as they had done in Elizabeth's time, and the printing presses were kept busy and the stage was well supplied with plays. One of the most famous of the poems published in the reign of James was called *Polyolbion*. Its author, Michael Drayton, like Stow and Hakluyt, wrote to praise his country. The poem is made up of thirty chapters and each chapter describes and praises some part of England, telling its history and its legends, and noting anything that is striking or pleasing in the people who live there. Drayton begins with the legend that all the old historians liked to believe—the coming of Brutus, the grandson of Æneas of Troy, to the shores of this country to “found Britain.” He then describes the south-west counties, and passes through Bath, Bristol, and Salisbury to Shropshire, Wales and Lancashire, and covers the whole of England chapter by chapter. *Polyolbion* is full of pleasant and spirited passages, and it is interesting to turn to the parts which describe districts you know, and find out how they looked to the poet in the early seventeenth century.

Drayton also wrote a number of poems which he called *Heroical Epistles*. These were letters supposed to have been exchanged between pairs of historical personages, such as Henry II and Fair Rosamund,

Queen Isabella and Mortimer, Lady Jane Gray and Lord Dudley. Perhaps you will like best of Drayton's



OLD ST. PAUL'S.

poems, *Nymphidia*, which tells of the adventures of the fairy world and shows us Oberon, Titania and Pigwiggin.

Other poets followed the Elizabethan custom of praising England and her rulers. The history of the Wars of the Roses was told in verse by Samuel Daniel, and both he and Drayton and many lesser poets continued to write sonnets and lyric poems.

The finest of the younger poets was John Donne, who, after many adventures abroad, and at home, became Dean of St. Paul's in 1621. Many of Donne's poems are strange and full of mystery. His mind did not rest when it had seen the beauty which lies on the surface of things; it pierced below the surface finding there strange likenesses and strange relationships between things that, on the surface, seemed too unlike to be thought of together. Much of his poetry is too hard to be understood at a first reading and, indeed, critics, who lived in the century after, laughed at him and despised him, not being able to catch the throbbing music of his finest poems or the piercing quality of the words in which he told his thoughts and feelings.

Donne's poetry had a good deal of influence on a group of younger poets who filled the days of James I and Charles I with song. Some of these poets were also soldiers, and they were on the King's side in the quarrels between Charles and his Parliament. For these reasons they were called the Cavalier poets, and their songs gave grave offence to the sterner Puritans, who thought that music and poetry and laughter were not among the best things in life. Herrick, one of the favourite poets of the time, was not a soldier. He was a clergyman, though you would hardly guess this by



A CAVALIER.

reading his poems. After a gay and agreeable life in London, he was sent to a little village in south Devonshire. Here he lived for nearly twenty years, not liking his parishioners very much, but content at heart, as his poems show us, with his small vicarage, his maid Prue, his dog Tracy, his cat and his pet lamb. Herrick sings with charming grace of daffodils, roses and violets, of the feasts of fairies, "of Brooks, of Blossoms, Birds and Bowers." His songs are like the songs of birds, so easily and naturally do they seem to flow; he can use tiny lines of four syllables and long lines of ten with equal skill, and he often plays with metres and makes them do whatever he wishes. When he returned to London he published his poems, calling the collection *Hesperides*. In this way he compared the west country, where his poems were written, to that western garden of golden fruit which the Greeks called the Hesperides.

While Herrick was writing his poems in his quiet Devonshire village, affairs were going very badly with his friends in London. Wise people began to realize that King Charles could not be trusted to keep the promises that had been wrung from him by his subjects, and they felt that civil war might soon break out. English people no longer felt buoyant and successful as they had done in the age of Elizabeth. A spirit of stern gloom took possession of many of them, and we see the reflection of this spirit in their writings.

Sir Francis Bacon, whose later prose works were written in the reign of James I, does not seem to have shared in the melancholy, which was to grow more noticeable, as time went on. Perhaps his interest in

the discovery of new truths in science kept him unconcerned. In clear and powerful prose he mapped out the whole field of knowledge, what men ought to look for in each province of knowledge, and how they should set about enlarging the provinces. In the *New Atlantis* he tells of the adventures of Englishmen, driven out of their course by contrary winds, till they reach an uncharted island. In this island, which existed only in his imagination, Bacon drew a picture of what the world might be if its rulers believed that the pursuit of knowledge was the first thing in life.

But other men felt acutely that depression and disappointment which often follows a time of great excitement and exertion. We can think of Elizabethan days as full of golden sunshine, but in the next age the sun did not shine so brightly and left many places in literature dark and threatening. The subjects that men chose to write on were often melancholy. One writer, Robert Burton, devoted his massive learning to the study of melancholy itself, and on the stage, plays became darker and gloomier than ever. D. m.

But we must not suppose that all prose writings and all stage plays were melancholy. There were many comedies for people to laugh at, and there was also a special kind of play called a "masque," very much in fashion at the Court entertainments. In a masque neither the plot nor the poetry was the most important part. The things that really mattered were the costumes, the music, the scenery and the dancing. Large sums of money were spent on making the masque as gorgeous as possible. The best designers were employed to make the costumes, the best musicians to provide the music, the best architect to D

plan the scenery, and sometimes great poets, like Ben Jonson, wrote the words. The masques were a kind of organized revel, and it must have been very delightful to see richly dressed lords and ladies taking their parts in the graceful processions which were part of the masque.

In spite of its attractive setting, the masque had neither the power nor the human interest of a real play and, at its poorest, was a display of extravagance. It was not liked by the Puritans, who, you remember, had always mistrusted the theatres, and looked on play-going as a loose and unseemly habit. As the power of the king and the cavaliers grew weaker, and the Puritans became stronger and stronger, they were able to put their opinions into practice. In 1640 they carried out a measure which they had long desired and ordered all theatres to be closed. For twenty years no play could be performed in London; only just towards the end of this time was a kind of musical play permitted.

Not all Puritans were unfriendly to poetry and drama, though most of them disapproved of the purposes for which literature had been used. Foremost among all poets in England is the stern Puritan poet, John Milton. In his life and works we can best see the struggle between the beliefs of the Puritan, and the need of the poet to express himself in the most lovely forms of language that he can find.

When Milton was still a child, his father decided that he was to be a great scholar and give up his life to literature. Milton himself tells us that from the time that he was twelve years old, he hardly ever left his studies until midnight. In this way he must certainly have begun that straining of his eyesight which in

later years made him completely blind, but nothing, he tells us, "could chill the ardour" of his pursuit of learning. He was sent to the famous London school, St. Paul's, where many a great man has spent his youth learning his Latin and Greek classics. At home he was taught foreign languages and practised music which was, throughout his life, his constant joy.

In 1625, the year of King James's death, he was sent to Cambridge and spent seven years there following the usual course of studies. Milton saw much at his university that was hateful to him. In his time, very many of his fellow-students were bent on entering the Church, not because they felt any call to help others, but because the Church could give them an easy living and the chance, in the future, of some important post, such as a canonry or even a bishopric. For this reason it was important for them to attend one of the universities so that they might take their degree in Divinity, and become known to the people who could help them on in their profession. Now, in the first place, Milton did not believe that there should be any bishops, and he hated all the pomp and all the ceremonies that surrounded bishops and other great Churchmen. In the second place, he did not think



PURITANS.

highly of the way in which Divinity was taught at the University. To his thinking, it was taught so as to sharpen the wits of the students rather than to raise their ideals. In the third place, he despised, with deepest scorn, those who were ready to make use of a noble profession merely to obtain their private ends.

Moreover, the conduct of many of the students who were studying for the Church filled him with disgust, and he was particularly wrathful when he saw them acting in the plays which were then given in the colleges. In later life he spoke angrily of these young men, "writhing and unboning their clergy limbs," as they appeared in the parts of clowns or buffoons, and he would have liked to do away with such performances entirely.

One of the least good qualities of a Puritan was his readiness to find fault with and condemn behaviour which differed from his own. Milton had this quality and he had, too, a temper which thought no words too harsh or abusive for one who differed from him. Sometimes his indignation is noble and makes his reproof noble too, as in the famous passage in *Lycidas*, where he denounces the hireling shepherds. But often, and especially in the pamphlets he wrote against his opponents in the Church or the State, his style is arrogant and forbidding.

He was probably glad to leave Cambridge and spend peaceful days in his father's home in Buckinghamshire. Here he spent six years preparing himself for the high calling of a poet, and turning over in his head great themes for poetry. While still at Cambridge, he had composed a splendid poem in honour of Christ's Nativity. At Horton, his father's home, he wrote

four poems, *L'Allegro* and *Il Penseroso*, *Lycidas*, *Comus*, and a fragment, *Arcades*.

L'Allegro is the gayest and most light-hearted of all Milton's poems. It tells of the sights and sounds of town and country which gladden the mood of a cheerful man. *Il Penseroso* describes the joys which are sought by a meditative man and these are more sober and yet satisfying. These two poems are written in lilting rhymed verse, and please the ear by their changing music. Milton was a lover of the sound of words, and he found the same kind of pleasure in arranging them in harmony as a violinist finds in trying over lovely chords. He had also the power of so choosing his words as to call up clear pictures in the minds of his hearers ; or, if he wished to make them feel, rather than see, his meaning, he chose just those words which suggested the frame of mind he wanted to secure. In *L'Allegro* you can find words and phrases which make you see the mountains, lawns and meadows of the country and hear "the busy hum" of cities. And in *Il Penseroso* there are pictures, and there are also "enchantments," "where more is meant than meets the ear."

Lycidas is a lament on the death of a young man, Edmund King, who had been a friend of Milton at Cambridge, and had been drowned while crossing the Irish Sea. King, like Milton, had intended to become a clergyman, and Milton laments the loss to the Church of one who was not like those false shepherds, whose sheep looked to them for food and were not fed. Sorrow for the loss of a friend, and indignation against self-seeking, irreligious men, are both to be found in *Lycidas* ; and no one who had not steeped his mind in

Greek, Latin, and Italian literature could have written this poem, where almost every line bears traces of their influence.

Comus is a masque, and we might, at first, be surprised to find Milton writing a play to be acted by the family of the Earl of Bridgewater in the grounds of Ludlow Castle ; but even the sternest taste could hardly have found fault with Milton's masque, for it is the story of the triumph of Chastity, and the Lady in *Comus* plays a part not unlike that of Una, in Spenser's *Faerie Queene*. Indeed, many people find fault with *Comus* because it is so little like a play and because, though full of lofty poetry, its speeches are too long and there is too little action.

In 1638 Milton left England to travel abroad. He must have been a very different traveller from the ordinary English gentleman who travelled to prove himself a man of fashion. Handsome and serious, he sought in each land the men most famed for learning, and the society of men who cared for music and literature. In Rome and Florence, he made many friends, and everywhere he was welcomed for his distinction of mind and bearing. But his pleasant travels were cut short by bad news from England, where the cause and the liberty of his friends were in danger. He hastened back to England. In London he found a house with a fair garden and he settled there, dividing his time between studying and teaching the sons of his friends. One of his friends begged him to write down his views on education—to say what subjects boys should study, and what good they should get from their studies. Milton wrote down his views, briefly but with great vigour. He seems to

have expected a very great deal from his pupils, and they must surely have had to work desperately hard to satisfy him.

It was becoming very clear to the leaders of his party, the Roundheads, that his was the most powerful pen in the whole kingdom, and for many years Milton had little time for poetry. His pen was needed to defend his party and to attack his enemies the Royalists.

Milton gave his heart and soul to the work. He attacked the bishops and their Church with savage eloquence. He defended the people of England when they were charged by a learned Dutchman with the murder of their lawful king, Charles I. For the defence of the people of England, he used the Latin tongue, in which he had great skill and, in spite of the blindness which overtook him, he was made Latin Secretary to Oliver Cromwell, who was then Protector of England.

As long as the Commonwealth ruled England Milton was held in high respect. He had long been determined to write a great poem or epic, and at length, he chose for his subject the story of the Garden of Eden, the fall of the rebel Angels, and sin of Adam and Eve, by which they lost Paradise. This subject seemed to Milton worthy of the grandest possible treatment, and he felt that he must call up all the force that was in him to deal fitly with it. For the actors in this story were human and superhuman, and the poet would be obliged to describe both God and man and God's treatment of man.

At first, Milton thought of making his great work a drama, but further thought convinced him that he

could do more justice to his theme if he made of it a narrative poem, on a scale as vast as the greatest poems of the Greek and Latin epic poets, Homer and Virgil. In this way he could best express the workings of his spacious imagination. He could find time and space to lavish all the wealth of beauty, with which years of thought and reading had stored his mind. An epic poem moves with majestic pace like the flood of some great level river ; and Milton chose wisely when he chose a form of poetry so suited to his genius.

Paradise Lost is held to be the grandest poem in English literature, and though there are passages which do not arouse any enthusiasm in us, there are others so splendid, so valiant, so modulated, that no words can praise them fitly. The best known passages are those in the first and second books, where Milton describes the fallen Angels and makes them utter their defiance of the Almighty. Generations of men and women have learnt these magnificent speeches by heart. Defiance has never been so grandly voiced. Milton himself seems to have been carried away by the grandeur of his own eloquence, for he has given to Satan, in all his ruined beauty, a fearful attraction which the other characters lack.

Paradise Lost is written in blank verse. In Milton's opinion, no other metre had the same dignity or the same range of harmony. He had used rhyme in his earlier poems and in the sonnets which he wrote throughout his life, but he speaks very contemptuously of poets who use rhyme in longer poems or in tragedies. Shakespeare, too, had rejected rhyming verse in his plays and had used blank verse, as Marlowe had done before him. Many poets have used this measure

since Milton's day, but none of them have ever surpassed him, and if we want to praise the blank verse of some later poet we still say "it has Miltonic echoes."

Before Milton had finished his epic the Restoration took place. Many of those who had upheld the Commonwealth were disgraced and broken, but Milton was not very harshly treated. Yet he knew that he had fallen on evil days. All that he had judged good and noble was lying in ruins around him. Blind, and surrounded by victorious enemies, he felt himself to be like Samson, delivered into the hands of the Philistines. In his dramatic poem, *Samson Agonistes*, he dwells on the evils of a lot not unlike his own; but Samson, blind and a captive, taunted by his wife and her countrymen, suffers a harder fate than Milton, until, at the end of the play, we hear that he has overwhelmed his enemies in his death. Again we find Milton writing a play, but *Samson Agonistes* was not meant to be acted on the English stage, for it followed very closely the model of the ancient classical tragedies, and it was certainly most unlike the plays that appeared in London when the Restoration reopened the theatres once more. In *Paradise Regained* Milton returned to epic poetry, and this was the last of his poems. He continued, to the end, his life of study, comforted by the visits of his friends and still delighting to hear music.

Of all his sonnets, that on his blindness is most often quoted. Its high seriousness and calm spirit show Milton's finest temper. It was this temper that enabled him to accept the world's coldness towards his great poetry. He wrote, he tells us, not to please the

world, but to please that audience, "fit though few," whose praise was his best reward.

It is not altogether surprising that *Paradise Lost* did not receive, on its first appearance, the praise it has since enjoyed. The friends of the new king, Charles II, did not forget Milton's defence of the execution of Charles I, and besides this, new fashions in literature were in favour and older ones were neglected. What these new fashions were we shall see later. We have still to hear of one more figure belonging to the old order, to the spirit of the Puritans and the Commonwealth. This is John Bunyan, whose *Pilgrim's Progress* is known to all English-speaking people.

Bunyan's early life was very unlike Milton's. He was born near Bedford, and belonged to what he calls the "meanest and most despised" of the people. He followed his father's trade and became a tinker in Bedford, having been long enough at school to learn to read. His companions were rough men and he learnt from them nothing but oaths and curses; but he had always a sense of better things, though for a long time he would not follow them. When civil war broke out he was still a youth, and he took part in some of the fighting. An intense interest in religion seized upon him, and his soul was tortured with the agony of his struggles to find peace of mind. His imagination was haunted by visions from which he may have drawn the figures of Apollyon and Giant Despair; and his bitter experiences have made his descriptions clear and vivid. He preached to the poor people of Bedford, but he was not looked on with favour, even by the ministers who were in power under the Commonwealth. Still less was he liked when the Restoration came.

Bunyan's early life.

He was forbidden to preach, but his conscience would not let him rest silent, and he was thrown into Bedford Gaol, where he spent seven years. Here he planned and wrote the first part of the *Pilgrim's Progress*. After his release from prison he was allowed to preach, and he divided his time between this work and writing. He wrote several long works, and a great number of tracts on religious matters and some on teaching.

It seems at first sight very strange that a man so little educated as Bunyan should have been able to write a book as famous as the *Pilgrim's Progress*. But although no one taught Bunyan the secret of writing vivid and masterly English, he had had a constant companion who was the best of teachers—the *Authorized Version of the English Bible*.

This great translation had been made by a number of scholars in the early years of the reign of James I—men who were masters of the finest Elizabethan prose. Their version took the place of all other earlier Bibles, and often passed into the hands of people who knew no other literature. The language of the Bible filled their ears with its eloquence, and passed into their lives, so that, in moments of great feeling, the familiar words of Scripture rose to their lips and they spoke its language. And those who read their Bible found in it, besides the guidance they sought there, the thrill and pleasure that all good literature gives. Even if they had no other books to read they had in the Bible history and poetry, prose dramas and lyric prose. The lives of great kings and prophets were unrolled before them, and they could watch the workings of human passions drawn for them in the language of power. The Bible taught Bunyan to write, it

taught him how to unroll his story and how to make it live.

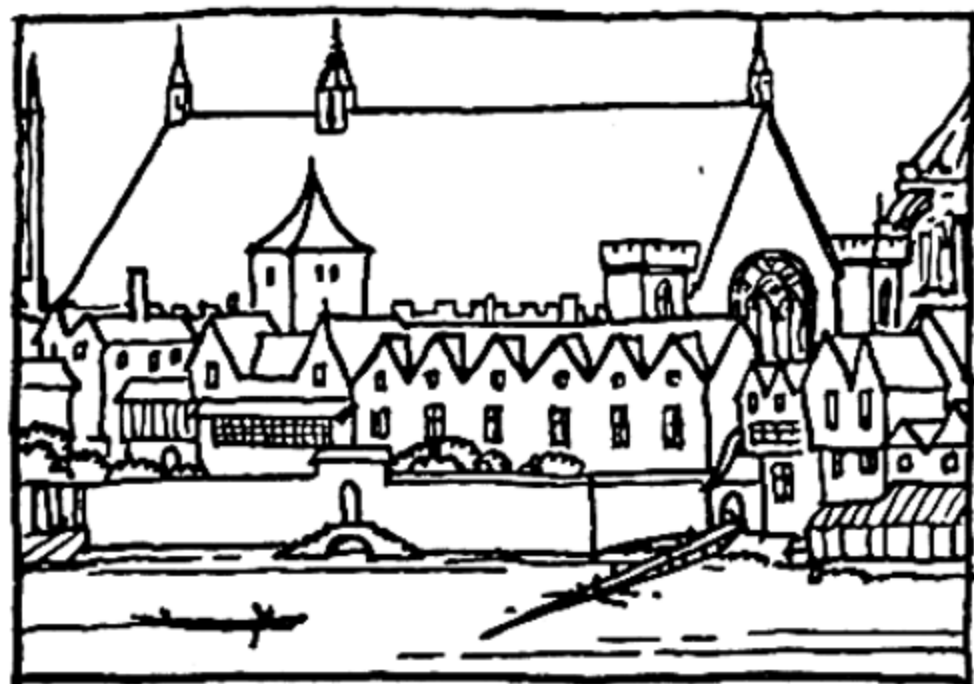
So, when we read Bunyan's *Pilgrim's Progress*, and listen to the turns of his language and follow the flow of his story, we can often hear, behind it all, the tones of the *Authorized Version*. And there are also passages where we hear Bunyan speaking in the vigorous, homely speech that was natural to him.

The story of the *Pilgrim's Progress* is, in part, the story of Bunyan's experiences and, in part, the story of every man. Christian is the hero of it. He cannot rest at home because he feels that he is sinful and must flee from the wrath to come. He meets Evangelist, who points out to him in the distance a wicket-gate through which he must pass if he hopes to find forgiveness. He takes leave of his wife and children and, in spite of his mocking neighbours, sets out with one called Pliable. Poor Christian has a great burden strapped on to his back, and by this burden we are to understand the burden of sin. When he and Pliable come to a very miry slough, which is known as The Slough of Despond, they begin to sink. Pliable is very angry with Christian and leaves him to struggle alone in the mire. Christian fights on till he reaches the farther side, where a man, called Hope, draws him out and sets him on sound ground. Christian is making his way in the direction of the wicket-gate when he is met by Mr. Worldly Wiseman, who advises him to take an easier path; but Evangelist comes to his rescue and he passes through the wicket-gate. So the Pilgrim begins his progress, helped on and hindered, meeting terrible adventures and false friends. He fights Apollyon, Prince of Darkness, and is taken captive by

Giant Despair and thrown into a dungeon. He is set upon and beaten in Vanity Fair, and his friend Faithful is done to death after a trial which is a mockery of justice. The story of the *Pilgrim's Progress* is too well known to be told again here. Everyone has his favourite part, and children and grown-up people love the book, for each can find in it something that gives him pleasure, either the wonderful adventures of Christian, or their inner meaning, the intense sincerity of its author which makes him love strongly and hate bitterly, or the vivid scenes, or the language, at once terse and impressive. Here is a passage which shows you Bunyan's vigorous way of dealing with character. He is describing the jury before whom Faithful was tried—

"Then went the jury out, whose names were Mr. Blindman, Mr. No-good, Mr. Malice, Mr. Love-lust, Mr. Live-loose, Mr. Heady, Mr. High-mind, Mr. Enmity, Mr. Liar, Mr. Cruelty, Mr. Hate-light and Mr. Implacable. . . . And first, among themselves, Mr. Blindman, the foreman, said, I see clearly that this man is a heretic. Then said Mr. No-good, Away with such a fellow from the earth. Ay, said Mr. Malice, for I hate the very looks of him. Then said Mr. Love-lust, I never could endure him. Nor I, said Mr. Live-loose, for he would always be condemning my way. Hang him, hang him, said Mr. Heady. A sorry scrub, said Mr. High-mind. My heart riseth against him, said Mr. Enmity. He is a rogue, said Mr. Liar. Hanging is too good for him, said Mr. Cruelty. Let us dispatch him out of the way, said Mr. Hate-light. Then said Mr. Implacable, Might I have all the world given me, I could not be reconciled

to him ; therefore let us forthwith bring him in guilty of death. And so they did ; therefore he was presently condemned to be had from the place from where he was, to the place from whence he came, and there to be put to the most cruel death that could be invented."



WESTMINSTER HALL IN SEVENTEENTH CENTURY.

CHAPTER VII.

AFTER THE RESTORATION.

I.

THE Restoration of the House of Stuart, in 1660, gave England a king who was determined to enjoy his new kingdom. His people, too, were eager to follow his example. Many of them were tired of the severe strait-laced Puritan Government, which had forbidden them to go to theatres, and had taken away from them many harmless pleasures. They were glad to be rid of rulers who kept a stern eye on their conduct and punished loose behaviour ; and, just because they had been so long deprived of their amusements, they could not have enough of them when, at last, they had their chance. The king, who had long been an exile in foreign countries, felt that he must make up for lost time and pleasures withheld. Charles II was a man of taste in literature and in music and the other arts, and he had spent his exile in countries where these things were admired and practised. The men of letters who had shared his exile from England, and those who had fared badly during the Commonwealth, looked forward to peace and favour under the new order.

Two books written about this time give us an idea of the changed life of the nation, and prepare us for a like change in its literature. Both books were written by Royalists, one by a poet, the other by a servant of the State.

The first of these books is *Hudibras*, written by Samuel Butler, who, though a Royalist, had spent some time in the house and service of a Roundhead leader, and had seen much of the life and manners of his master's friends. What he saw must have filled him with secret laughter, for his poem, *Hudibras*, written after the Restoration, makes the Roundheads as absurd and ridiculous as possible. All their faults and affectations are exaggerated in the person of Sir Hudibras, who is a Roundhead Justice of the Peace. Attended by his foolish squire, Ralpho, he rides through the country, inquiring into imaginary troubles, and making himself a laughing stock by his boasting, his owl-like stupidity, and his pretended learning. He has all the tricks with which the Roundheads were said to advertise their godliness—psalm-singing through their noses, refusing to eat mince pies at Christmas, and looking on plum-puddings as devices of the devil.

Butler's poem is called a mock epic, because the writer pretends to describe, in a lofty and serious fashion, the deeds of his hero and is really making fun of him all the time. Sir Hudibras recalls another famous hero, Don Quixote, the creation of the Spanish novelist, Cervantes ; but Sir Hudibras is a much more ridiculous person than Don Quixote, and not as lovable.

Butler has managed to make his language just as amusingly exaggerated as his hero. He makes use of the most wonderful rhymes and coins words that had never existed before. No wonder that King Charles and his courtiers were delighted with this witty ridicule of their enemies, and it became the fashion for the courtiers to quote the rhyming couplets of *Hudibras* with keen enjoyment. Butler himself

received little reward except fame. He is said to have died as he lived, in poverty, but the great Dr. Samuel Johnson, who wrote an account of Butler's life in 1777, nearly a hundred years after the poet's death, spoke of him as "a man whose name can only perish with his language."

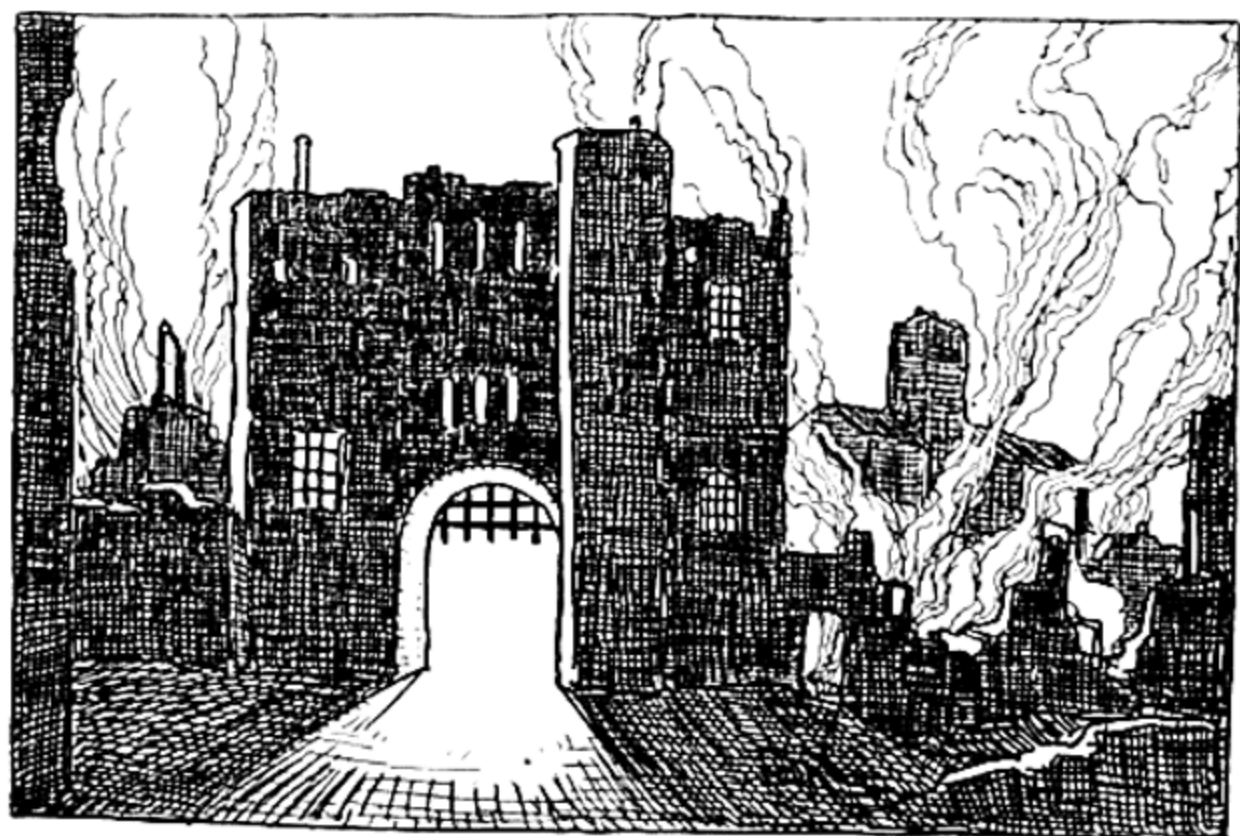
Butler wrote of the Roundheads when their sun seemed to have set and when it was safe to laugh at their pretensions; but sober-minded men, who had not been in sympathy with the harshness and affectation of the Puritans, were very soon to long for the virtues which these qualities had concealed, reverence and self-restraint, and honesty in the service of the State. These were the virtues which were entirely lacking in the Court of the restored monarch, Charles II, whose rule was the most vicious and dishonest that England had yet seen. Disappointment with the worthless king, and anger at the shameless men and women whom he made his companions, moved poets to write sterner satires on the Restoration Court than Butler had written on the Roundheads. Andrew Marvell, a friend of Milton and a lover of the Commonwealth, has given us, besides extraordinarily beautiful and happy verses, a terrible picture of the corruption of the Court of Charles II; but by far the best account of these times has been left for us by Samuel Pepys in his famous *Diary*, which covers the years 1659-1669.

Pepys was a public servant, being secretary to the Admiralty, working with the Earl of Sandwich and sometimes coming into contact with the Duke of York, who was at the head of the Navy. Thus he had many chances of seeing the great ones in the land, and of hearing and seeing things not generally known

to other men. Very fortunately for us, who read his diary, he was a man consumed with curiosity. He was curious, in a childish way, about the rumours and the gossip which were spread abroad about great people; he was curious about other people's dress and about how much money they had to spend; but he was also curious in matters of higher value, in music, pictures, buildings, new discoveries in science, and in books, sermons and plays. He seems to have had leisure to run off to view the latest novelties in any part of the city, but he was also an excellent public servant, with an orderly mind and a taste for precision and exactitude in recording his work. He was both discreet and indiscreet. He kept a diary, in which he recorded with amazing frankness the most intimate of his private affairs, but he took the precaution of making his entries in a kind of shorthand, or cypher, so that no one else should be able to read what his love of gossiping had made him set down. Probably it was only to his diary that he gossiped, and the knowledge that no one would be able to read what he wrote, made him fearlessly honest. And so his comments on the great people whom he saw, or on the Court scandals, or the conduct of the Dutch War, or on "the brave music" and singing at church, and the plays and players at the newly opened theatres, are as free and natural as they can well be.

The *Diary* opens in the year 1659, and describes the excitement of London citizens over the rumoured overthrow of the Commonwealth and the return of the king. Pepys was one of those who went over to Holland to escort Charles II back to his kingdom. From his diary, we learn how the king looked, and how

he bore himself, how he talked to those who were on board with him and told them of his escapes after the battle of Worcester, how the people at Dover received him with joy, and how the Mayor gave the king "a very rich Bible, which he took and said it was the thing he loved above all other things in the world." We can



FIRE OF LONDON AT LUDGATE.

feel, as we read these passages, how hugely delighted Pepys was to be present at such an important scene, and to be in the company of such exalted personages; for there is no doubt that Pepys was a busybody who loved to be in the thick of everything and to catch, if possible, the eye of some great man. For ten years we can see life in England as Pepys saw it—ten years in which the nation began by making holiday over the return of the House of Stuart; in which the theatres were reopened and gaiety restored; in which the

D.
M.

Plague came to London and slew hundreds of men and women, and the Great Fire destroyed life and property ; in which the rejoicings over the return of the Stuarts were changed into anger and bitter regret. All this is recorded by Pepys together with other matters, less important to the nation, but of enormous interest to the diarist—the arrival of his new suit from his tailor, and the shape of his wife's new sacque, the notice with which the Duke of York favours him, the colour and fashion of his new coach, and the feelings which arise in him, as he and his wife ride for the first time in a coach of their own, which “do make my heart rejoice and praise God, and pray him to bless it to me and continue it. And so home, it being a mighty pleasure to go in a coach of our own to a play and makes us appear mighty great, I think, in the world.”

Pepys, like the men of wit and fashion he admired, was a great lover of the theatre, and he seems to have been resolved to let no new stage performance go unseen. His diary is a good record of the plays that were staged at the two newly-opened theatres, and we discover much that is of interest about the skill of the actors and the taste of the audiences of his time. The king and his friends were often to be seen at the playhouses, and it was the aim of the author and the actors to hit the taste of the Court party.

For nearly twenty years England had had to go without any theatres, and when, at the Restoration, stage plays were again permitted, there were not a great many new plays to act nor trained actors to appear in them ; for few dramatists wrote plays when it was forbidden to produce them in public. So at first the theatres had to fall back on the plays which had been

acted a generation before. Of these the most popular were the comedies of Ben Jonson and the plays of Shakespeare, and of Beaumont and Fletcher and the later Jacobean dramatists. But the taste of one period differs from that of another period and some of the plays that were reproduced were felt to be old-fashioned, and it amuses us now to know that even the plays of Shakespeare, such as *The Tempest* and *Antony and Cleopatra* had to be furbished up to suit the taste of Restoration audiences.

But while England had been forced to neglect drama, France had cultivated it, and dramatists had arisen of whose names France is most justly proud—Corneille, Racine and Molière. Charles II and many of his Royalist nobles had spent part of their exile in Paris at the Court of Louis XIV, where refinement in wit and polished courtliness in expression were sought after and welcomed. To men who had admired the stately measured dignity of the tragedies of Corneille and Racine and the brilliant wit and masterly plots of Molière's comedies, the plays which had held the English stage before the theatres were closed might easily appear crude, shapeless, or hoydenish. When the great makers of Elizabethan and Jacobean drama died, lesser men took their places and were not able to master their art, and the drama, which had been like a garden glowing with colour, became rank and straggling and in great need of pruning. Englishmen were aware of the need of pruning their garden, and tidying up the straggling blank verse in which many dramas had been written, and it was not unnatural that they should be greatly impressed by the new drama in France which was remarkable for just those qualities

that England lacked. But the greatness of French drama, and of French tragedy, in particular, is different in its nature from the greatness of English drama, and people who value the French masterpieces of tragedy very highly cannot always appreciate the greatest English tragedies, and it so happened that English playmakers, in their admiration of the French stage, lost sight of the great qualities of earlier English plays. It is not surprising, then, that instead of following the great fashion of Shakespeare and their own national drama, they followed the fashion of French drama, copying it, borrowing from it, and making translations so as to make their work as much like it as possible.

Their imitation of French comedy was more successful than their imitation of tragedy, for they could not quite catch the restrained grandeur and passion of Corneille or Racine and they produced instead, plays which strike us now as unreal in character, and unnatural and stilted in language. John Dryden, the greatest poet of the day, wrote many such tragedies, which we now call heroic plays because they often deal with the fates of heroic figures such as Indian Queens and Indian Emperors. These heroes, unlike those of Shakespeare, are much more kings and queens than men and women, and play out their high-sounding parts on the stage with great effect, but they would seem out of place except on the stage.

Dryden did not use blank verse for his tragedies as Shakespeare had done. Like the French playwrights, he made use of rhyming verse, and the metre which he chose was that which was to usurp the place of blank verse until the beginning of the nineteenth century. This was the famous "heroic couplet."

The use of rhyme in tragedy had been condemned by Milton, but Milton's voice was no longer heeded and his poetry was neglected by all but a few. Dryden, himself, after nearly twenty years of playwriting, changed his views about rhymed verse and decided in favour of blank verse. But even if we prefer blank verse nowadays, as the Elizabethans did before us, there is no doubt that it was an excellent thing that the Restoration poets preferred the heroic couplet; for the poet, when he uses the couplet, is bound by more definite rules than when he uses blank verse, and he needs great precision and skill if he is to get the best results from it. The poets of the late seventeenth and eighteenth centuries learnt to do this, and so gave to English verse the quality it needed.

The best comedies of the Restoration period were written in prose and they, too, show how much their authors had gained from the study of the French stage. Many of them, especially those of Wycherley and Congreve, were brilliantly clever; but they show us a world in which men and women were generally vicious or heartless, and pursued their pleasures with little regard for decency. Whether these characters were really portraits drawn from the society of the day, or whether they lived only in the imagination of their creators, they are not, apart from their wit and gaiety, attractive people, nor are they profound studies in human nature. But they pleased the audiences of their time, and no dramatist of a later day neglects to study the comedies of the Restoration stage, for they are models of construction and examples of the true spirit of comedy.

II.

Charles II liked to be thought a patron of poetry as well as of drama, and his courtiers liked to pose occasionally as poets. Sir Charles Sedley and the Earl of Dorset were the most famous of the courtly poets, and their love songs are marked with an airy or mocking gracefulness and polished ease of manner. A good example of their art is seen in a song by the Earl of Dorset, written at sea, in the first Dutch war, which begins, "To all you ladies now at land." Dorset, though a man of fashion and a rake, was a kind patron to poor poets who had to earn their living by their pens, and he it was who gave help and encouragement to Matthew Prior, the most charming lyric writer of the Restoration.

Very different in temper from these noble poets and their circle was Abraham Cowley, though he, too, was a Royalist, and had shared the exile of the Royal Family in Paris. Cowley wrote one long poem and a number of elaborate odes on the model of the odes of the Greek poet, Pindar. He was a scholar and a lover of meditation and solitude, and his prose essays have a grave and delicate charm. But one great figure stands out, head and shoulders above lesser writers, John Dryden, dramatist, critic, debater in verse, translator, song-writer, and satirist.

In everything that he wrote, Dryden gave proof of an extraordinary vigour of mind which raised him above other men. He lived in troubled times, when it was often difficult to remain true to one's beliefs, and Dryden, who began by writing a poem to lament the death of Oliver Cromwell, and then wrote one in glowing welcome of the return of the Stuarts, who defended

the Church of England when Charles was king, and defended the Church of Rome when James II ruled, was accused by many of double-dealing ; but no one ever doubted his energy of mind, his mastery of the English language, or his triumphant use of the verse forms he chose to wield.

Dryden was born in 1631. He studied at Cambridge and, in 1658, he published his poem on the death of Cromwell. He celebrated the restoration of Charles II and, in 1667, published a poem *Annus Mirabilis, or the Year of Wonders*. In this poem he described the events of the wonderful year



DRYDEN.

1666, and in it you will find vivid pictures of sea-fights with the Dutch and of the Fire of London—pictures which you may compare with those in the diary of Pepys or in that of John Evelyn, a learned gentleman who also kept his journal of events.

For nearly eighteen years Dryden was busy writing plays, and he also found time to write about the making of plays and the rules which should govern this art. This sort of writing is called dramatic

criticism and Dryden was one of the early masters of criticism in England. It is interesting to know that Dryden's independent spirit and clear-sightedness made him an admirer of two great writers, who were not as highly valued by other critics of his day—Shakespeare and Milton.

Dryden became Poet Laureate and was acknowledged as the greatest living poet. Many stories are told of his visits to Will's Coffee House, where he used to sit in state and receive the younger writers who came to pay their respects to him and listen to his judgments. Among these visitors was a boy of twelve, already determined to be a poet. He was to succeed in the next generation to the throne of Dryden. His name was Alexander Pope.

It was not till 1681 that Dryden published the poem by which he is, perhaps, best remembered, *Absolom and Achitophel*. There was no name on the title page of the poem, but everyone knew that only one man was capable of this mighty, sweeping satire. Dryden called his satire *Absolom and Achitophel*, but everyone knew that these names were very thin disguises for two men who were then the centre of public interest—the Duke of Monmouth, the king's illegitimate son, who had plotted against his father, and the Earl of Shaftesbury, who had angered Charles by trying to exclude the king's brother from the throne. Charles II appears under the title of David, Jerusalem stands for London, and the troublesome citizens are spoken of as Jebusites.

The most famous passages in the poem are the most famous in all English satiric verse. They are the descriptions, of Achitophel and of Zimri who—

“ Stiff in opinion, always in the wrong
Was everything by starts and nothing long,
But in the course of one revolving moon
Was chymist, fiddler, statesman, and buffoon.”

Another unlucky butt for Dryden's satire was a third-rate and malicious poet who had attacked Dryden. Dryden, in reply, held him up to endless laughter as Mac Flecknoe, son of Dullness.

These poems were written in the metre which Dryden had made completely his own, the heroic couplet, and when he turned from satire to religious argument he remained faithful to the couplet. *Religio Laci, or a Layman's Faith* is Dryden's defence of the English Church. *The Hind and the Panther* is his defence of his adopted religion.

The Revolution of 1688, in which James II lost his throne, was a disaster to Dryden, who remained a Catholic and was no longer allowed to be Laureate. But he was still the greatest figure of the day and his energy was not less than it had been. He set to work to write new plays and undertook translations. In 1694, he began to turn into English the works of the Latin poet, Virgil, and in three years he had finished his task. When he was nearly seventy years old, he produced his last work which was a collection of translations from Chaucer and the Italian poet, Boccaccio, with a prose preface of great interest. One of the last of his poems was his grand ode called *Alexander's Feast, or the Power of Music*, which everyone should know by heart. Dryden died in 1700 and was buried in the Poets' Corner in Westminster Abbey.

Almost all the writers, who have been mentioned in

this chapter, were more or less closely connected with the Court or the capital. London was the centre of life and literature flourished there, but the greatest prose writer of the day, who was also one of the greatest prose writers of all time, lived not in London, but in Norwich. In this quiet and dignified city Sir Thomas Browne passed the greater part of his days, escaping the dangers and excitements of London life. Here he worked as a physician, read the Greek and Latin authors he delighted in, and meditated on the meaning of life and death. In prose of rare beauty he has given us the fruits of his meditations, choosing as titles for his works *Religio Medici* (The Faith of a Doctor, 1642), *Vulgar Errors* (1646), *Urn Burial* and *The Garden of Cyrus* (1658).

Sir Thomas Browne was a learned man and a philosopher, and only learned people can fully realize the depths of his meaning and follow the workings of his mind. It is not easy for those who have not read the ancient authors beloved by him, to enjoy the full richness of his language, for his prose is shaped and coloured by his favourite reading. There are long, winding and harmonious sentences whose music rolls on, ebbing and flowing, like a great tide. There are sounding words of many syllables, and phrases like chords played on an organ. It is easy for us to enjoy the music of this majestic prose long before we can really grasp the fullness of its meaning. A full understanding can come only when we are older, but it is enough, for the present, to remember that in the writings of Sir Thomas Browne lies a kingdom of grave delight, waiting for us until we are prepared to enter into it.

The prose of Sir Thomas Browne, like the blank verse of Milton, needs the hand of a master to shape it and make it beautiful. Otherwise it may easily become heavy and unwieldy, confused and shapeless ; and in the writings of other men who tried to write as Sir Thomas Browne did, we see these defects. And, just as there had been an effort to make poetry clearer and more precise in form, so in prose there was a change in the direction of simpler and shorter sentences. If you compare the sentences of Defoe or Addison or Swift with the sentences in *Urn Burial*, you will see that, while both are excellent, they are very different in kind. You will probably find, now, at any rate, that the meaning of Addison is much clearer to you than that of Sir Thomas Browne. This clearness and simplicity in form is one of the marks of what is called the Augustan Age of English literature, and Addison, Swift, Steele and Pope are the most famous writers of that age. We shall have to consider these writers and their age in the next chapter, but Defoe, who belongs in time to their period, differs from them in many ways and may be dealt with here.

Daniel Defoe was born in London a year before the Restoration of King Charles II. His father was a tradesman and a Dissenter, and his son was educated at a famous Dissenting academy, where he received a sound education. Defoe was to have been a Dissenting minister, but he became, instead, a tradesman. In many of his later writings he made use of his early experience, and has left us many descriptions of life in the London streets, and of rogues and thieves and honest tradesmen. But he soon became interested in other concerns and began to write pamphlets. There was plenty of

room for a pen as ready and trenchant as Defoe's. In these days the Government was beginning to divide itself into those two great divisions which have lasted so long—the Whigs and the Tories. Each party wished to strengthen itself and gain more followers,



DEFOE.

and so each party was anxious to secure the pens of those who could state its position most favourably, and attack its rival most violently.

Defoe was a Whig and hated the Tories, against whom he waged a life-long war. While the Tories were in power he did not escape their anger. Once, when he had written a particularly telling satire on the Tory party (*The Shortest Way with Dissenters*), he was condemned to stand in the pillory. But the people, who usually enjoyed pelting those who had to stand in the pillory and heaping abuse on them, formed a guard round Defoe and protected him from his enemies; and Defoe himself made a poem called a *Hymn in the Pillory* in which he again attacked his enemies.

There were numerous pamphlet writers in these times, but Defoe was easily the most powerful. He had a curious fashion of pretending to support men and measures which he was really bent on destroying, of pretending that he was stating their case in the best possible manner while, in reality, he was showing it in the worst possible light. This fashion of writing, which is called Irony, was extremely effective. His readers began by believing that his arguments were

serious, and then, gradually perceiving that Defoe was really mocking the things he seemed to praise, they were ready to laugh with him at the object of his solemn ridicule. A still greater master of irony than Defoe was Dean Swift, and the French writer Voltaire, who is suaver but not less destructive than Swift, is thought by some to excel him.

Pamphlet writing made Defoe famous in his own day, but to us he is best known as the author of *Robinson Crusoe* (1719), *The Memoirs of a Cavalier*, *The Journal of the Plague*, *Colonel Jack* and several other stories. Each of these stories is so natural and life-like in character and detail, that the people of Defoe's time, who were not used to that kind of writing which we call fiction, believed that they were reading the actual histories of real people, and Defoe did not always undeceive them.

For a long time people believed that the *Memoirs of a Cavalier* had been written by some Royalist soldier, who had seen service abroad and had fought for King Charles at home; and, indeed, the defeat of the Royalists at Marston Moor and the retreat of the Cavalier through the wilds of Yorkshire and Lancashire, could not have been more vividly told by one who had taken part in them. Again, the *Journal of the Plague* in London tells of the desolation which took place when Defoe was not more than two years old, yet it is sometimes hard to believe that he is describing things he had not seen for himself.

In each of Defoe's stories the events are told by the chief actor in them. Robinson Crusoe, the Cavalier, Colonel Jack, each tells his life history in his own words and in his own way. The author seems never to

interfere, or to do more than set down a tale which has been told to him, and in this way he makes his narrative direct, and his story convincing.

There is something peculiarly plain and downright in Defoe's way of writing. Even if he has wonderful adventures to tell, his account of them is so plain and unvarnished that he gives them an air of simple truth. He does not make his adventurers or adventuresses at all romantic. However marvellous their careers, they themselves are shrewd matter-of-fact people. Even his rogues and thieves are not reckless or swaggering figures; they are often rather thrifty fellows, balancing up the profits and losses of their profession in a sober, business-like fashion.

Defoe has an amazing power of making us see his scenes as clearly and definitely as if he had photographed them for us. Often he does this by his method of adding stroke after stroke, detail after detail, in a sober, patient fashion. Not a single detail escapes him, and he seems to be a keen-eyed observer noting down the details of some scene which he has witnessed, whereas he is really inventing both scene and details. Whether he is describing the lonely island in mid-ocean, or the convict settlement in Virginia, the room of a lady of fashion, or the night haunts of homeless boy thieves, he gives us the same feeling of absolute accuracy. Yet we do not grow tired of his endless details, for he knows how to make them interesting.

Defoe died in 1731. During his long life-time he undertook many tasks and wrote on many subjects. One of his most important works was his famous *Review* which he planned when he was in prison. The

Review was a journal which was to appear three times a week. It was to furnish its readers with the news in politics and commerce, but it was also to discuss matters of taste and conduct in everyday life. For more than eight years Defoe carried on his journal, single-handed, and although it was overshadowed by other more famous journals which followed it, the credit of being one of the first in the field belongs to Defoe.

CHAPTER VIII.

THE EIGHTEENTH CENTURY.

I

THE poets of the eighteenth century, and of the first half in particular, desired two things—to be correct and to be reasonable. Being correct meant writing smooth, regular lines which obeyed exactly the rules of the heroic couplet, with its five iambic beats, ten syllables and end rhyme. (Being reasonable meant having clear-cut, precise views about life in general—views which had been formed under the direction of what the poets themselves praised as “cold common sense.”)

(This period is sometimes called the Age of Reason, because it judged conduct, desires, religion, poetry and beliefs by the light of reason and common sense, and admired them when they seemed reasonable and sensible, and condemned them when they did not.) Reason and common sense are, of course, excellent judges in many matters of importance, but they are not our only guides. We can often decide whether certain things are good and beautiful by our feelings with regard to them; we do not need to reason. We do not need our reason to tell us that moonlight on a mountain lake is beautiful. Its loveliness thrills us. But many eighteenth century poets seem to have looked on reason as the only judge whose opinion really mattered, and they are far more anxious to appeal to the common sense of their readers than to their sense

of beauty. (We praise their poetry because it is polished, clear-cut, and forcible, but they rarely thrill us with the sudden loveliness of their verse.)

(The poets of this age cut themselves off from many things which make life and poetry beautiful.) They were, for the most part, town-dwellers. (They preferred the wit and gossip of the coffee-house to the sounds of Nature or her silence. The country figured in their minds as a vastly uncomfortable place, remarkable chiefly for the shocking state of the miry lanes, through which their patron's coach plunged and rocked, as my lord drove down to his country seat. Country life to the town wit or poet was intolerably dull. He seems to have found nothing grand or moving in mountains or moorland, and he shows no warmth or tenderness for the small creatures of the countryside or the delicate growth of flowers or mosses. If, in the course of his poem, he felt called on to describe some natural scene, he did not trouble to look at it with his own eyes. He read what other poets had said about nature and borrowed their descriptions, and as his fellow poets did exactly the same and no one made any fresh descriptions, nearly all the poets of this age use exactly the same kind of words when they are describing the sun, the moon, the streams and meadows, or any natural scene.

The society in which they lived was, in many ways, very artificial, and they came to despise simple words and phrases as beneath the dignity of their poetry. Instead, they made use of stilted and affected language. Fishes became "the finny tribe," birds became "the feathered tribe." A country girl was called a "nymph" and a country lad a "swain." The meadows are always

“verdant,” the woods are “flowery, sylvan scenes”; the sun is Phœbus, the moon Diana. Poets who began to write at the end of the eighteenth century hated this artificial language, and one of them, Wordsworth, could find no words too harsh for what he called the poetic diction of the eighteenth century.

(The greatest poet of the early eighteenth century was Alexander Pope, who succeeded to the throne of Dryden and reigned supreme in his day.) Pope is a striking instance of a poet who laboured to become great, and cultivated his native gifts with unceasing toil. Nothing that he wrote pleased him till he had polished and repolished it, and made it express his meaning to perfection. (His wit was naturally sharp, and he sharpened it till he had made it as keen as the edge of a rapier.) He studied the structure of the heroic couplet and practised it until; as he tells us in his preface to *The Essay on Man*, (he could write with greater point and precision in verse than in prose.)

At a very early age Pope had determined to become a famous poet, and his parents were pleased that he should devote all his energies to the task. He was a very delicate child, far too weakly to be sent to school, and, as he and his parents were Catholics, he studied at home under the guidance of a priest. To his parents Pope was always deeply attached, but his ill-health, which was life-long, made him peevish with others and ready to resent imaginary insults. There was a malicious strain in him, and when he grew older he could rarely resist a chance of stabbing with his pen either friend or foe, especially if he could do so and not be found out. He became, as we might

expect, a satiric poet. He was often exceedingly bitter, and a great part of his life was spent in spiteful quarrels with his critics.

Pope published his first important poem in 1711, when he was not much more than twenty years old. This was his *Essay on Criticism*, in which he settled, as he thought, the whole business of criticism, the failing of critics and their duties, adding a short and imperfect account of the history of criticism from the time of Aristotle to his own day. Pope says many just things and some foolish ones, but he delivers all his judgments with an air of being always in the right and settling the matter once and for all. (The extraordinary skill with which he said what he had to say, gave such point and weight to his statements that his readers were convinced of their truth.) But in spite of all his learning, there were some questions, which Pope at the age of twenty, or indeed at any time of his life, was not qualified to settle. The finest critics are content to discuss certain matters to which there are no final answers, but Pope, like the age in which he lived, preferred to be positive, and it sometimes happened that he forgot the warning he had so aptly given to others—

“Fools rush in where Angels fear to tread.”

But it is easy to find a great many passages in the essay where Pope says something undeniably true which “oft was thought but ne’er so well expressed.” Here are a few instances to think over—

“A vile conceit, in pompous words expressed,
Is like a clown in regal purple dressed.”

"A perfect judge will read each work of wit
With the same spirit that its author writ."

"Some judge of authors' names, not works, and then
Nor praise nor blame the writings but the man."

And

"Envy will merit as its shade pursue,
But like a shadow prove the substance true."

But sometimes he states half-truths, or truths which he had only half grasped, with the same certainty, and in the *Essay on Man* (1733) he laid himself open to the attacks of critics, by his attempt to condense into brilliant couplets matters too high or too subtle for his intellect.

The most pleasing of Pope's poems is his *Rape of the Lock*. This is the story of a peer who falls in love with Belinda, lady-in-waiting to the queen. He covets one of the two curls which the nymph, "to the destruction of mankind," wears hanging down behind her neck, and, watching his moment, cuts off the precious curl. The lady and her friends are furious and challenge the peer to battle; but Jove, looking down from the heavens on their strife, puts an end to the quarrel, and draws up the severed curl to heaven, where it becomes a new and radiant star.

On this trivial story Pope lavished all his poetic power, all his wit and fancy. He pretended to regard the theft of the curl as a matter of enormous importance, worthy of the pen of an epic poet, and he describes the events which lead to the theft of the curl, with a mock dignity and stateliness which is very amusing. In great epic poems the poet generally

brings into his story supernatural beings, and invokes the aid of gods and goddesses to help his hero through the dangers which threaten him. Pope invented a new race of supernatural beings to help on the story of his mock epic. Sylphs and gnomes are invoked to guard Belinda, her curl and her little dog, Shock, but they cannot prevent the tragedy, and when the peer with his "fatal engine" (his scissors) advances towards the curl—

"E'en then, before the fatal engine closed,
A wretched sylph too fondly interposed;
Fate urged the shears, and cut the sylph in twain,
(But airy substance soon unites again),
The meeting points the sacred hair dis sever
From that fair head for ever and for ever."

Pope was highly praised for his clever invention and for the brilliant fashion in which he described Belinda's toilet, the pleasure party to Hampton Court, and the game of cards in stately, mock heroic words.

In 1712, Pope, who lacked neither courage nor industry, undertook to translate *Homer's Iliad* into English verse, and he carried out his plan with honour and profit to himself, although he was not really a scholar and, as Dr. Johnson said, "he did not overflow with Greek." He also edited the works of Shakespeare, a task beyond his strength, though he himself did not realize this and was enraged when critics praised the edition of his rival, Theobald. In revenge, he made a general attack on the race of critics in a poem called *The Dunciad* (1728), in which he makes Theobald reign king in the kingdom of Dullness, where critics live. He dedicated his poem to his friend, Dean

Swift, and congratulated himself on having destroyed his enemies by his ridicule; but *The Dunciad* shows Pope in his worst light. It was enjoyed by many readers in its day, but it contains too many venomous and disgusting passages to please us now.

As he grew famous, Pope was much sought after by noblemen and politicians. He liked flattery and deference, but he would never sell his pen to the highest bidder as other writers did, and wrote only on those subjects which appealed to him. (One of his favourite subjects was the state of the society in which he lived, and nothing pleased him better than to paint, with bitter wit, the follies and excesses of the men and women of his age. Writers in Queen Anne's day do not seem to have had a very high opinion of their fellow creatures, and are more apt to dwell on their vices than on their virtues. Pope had a very sharp eye for the follies of others, and liked to denounce them in a highly moral tone of indignation.) With this end in view he wrote his *Moral Epistles*. These letters in verse attack society in general, and certain men and women in particular. The latter are introduced into the poem under assumed names, but they are easily identified. Everyone in London knew that Atossa was the Duchess of Marlborough, just as, in another poem, they recognized in Atticus a satiric description of the poet's friend, Addison.

The poets of this age liked to trace a resemblance between themselves and the poets who had flourished when the Emperor Augustus ruled in Rome. The Latin poet most admired by Pope was Horace, whose polished ease and wit he had long studied. Towards the end of his life, Pope produced a number of poems

which he called *Imitations of Horace*. In these poems he kept the framework and general manner of Horace's *Satires* and *Epistles*, at the same time adapting them so as to make them apply to the English society in which he moved. His satiric power is here shown at its best, and the poems reveal with bitter frankness the spirit of the time.

★ (Pope, at one time or another, numbered among his friends the three most famous prose writers of the Augustan age — Dean Swift, Joseph Addison and Richard Steele. Of these three men Dean Swift was the most powerful intellect, though his



SWIFT.

writings do not show that kindness of heart which make Steele and Addison delightful.)

↙ (Swift, like Pope, relied on his pen to raise him to fame, and succeeded. Though he began by writing verses, he found that he could express himself most fully in prose.) He was born in Ireland, but he spent his early manhood in the household of Sir William Temple, who was himself an author and quick to discover the power that was in Swift. In this household Swift found leisure to read and study. His patron had influence with the king, William III, and

Swift may have hoped that some good office might fall to his share. He did receive a living in Ireland, but this did not satisfy his ambition, and it was not until the last years of the reign of Queen Anne that Swift became all powerful with the queen's Tory ministers, Harley and Bolingbroke. By this time, he had proved, beyond all doubt, that no master of literature could equal him in the range, depth and vigour of his irony.

(He had written an ironical account of a quarrel between the scholars of his time called *The Battle of Books*, in which he had proved his learning and deluged his enemies with ridicule. In 1704 he wrote *The Tale of a Tub*, a satire on the three chief forms of religion in England, told in the fashion of a fable. It would be difficult to find a more ironic or contemptuous attack on human beliefs than *The Tale of a Tub*, though it was written by a professed minister of one of the three religions he satirized, and, indeed, it would be hard to find anyone who took a more savage delight than Swift, in exposing the weaknesses of human nature and pointing out its baseness.)

Swift wrote largely in support of his political party in a periodical called the *Examiner*, but the work by which he is best remembered was written when the Tories had lost their power. (When George I became king, Swift retired to Ireland to continue his duties) as Dean of St. Patrick's, in Dublin. (It was here that *Gulliver's Travels* was written.)

Gulliver's Travels has long been used as a children's story book, especially the first two books where the kingdoms of Lilliput and Brobdingnag are described. Children have accepted these books and enjoyed them

as though Swift's hero, Gulliver, were another Robinson Crusoe, for the author, by his amazing inventions and his power of telling a story, holds fast our interest.

(But *Gulliver's Travels* is not merely an ingenious tale; it is a most ingenious satire on mankind in general, and on Englishmen in particular. In the third and fourth books the satire becomes more evident, and Swift's pictures of humanity become more painful. He spared neither wit nor grossness in his effort to deride his fellow creatures; and some people have thought that such a book as *Gulliver's Travels* could only have been written by one who hated humanity.)

(Yet Swift was not without warmth and good feeling for his friends.) In his journal to Stella, he proves that where he has no desire to hurt he can be gay and amusing. (He could feel indignation at tyranny, and he defended the Irish people against injustice) (He could be angry at those who attacked Christianity) and he used his ironic wit to censure such people.) (He was keenly interested in language and anxious that all educated people should speak and write correct English.) (He disliked all affected writing, and never allowed himself to fall below the high standard he had set himself, and so his prose has the best qualities of Augustan prose—it is clear, strong and elegant.) Swift's last years were very terrible, and his life closed in 1744, after a long period of insanity.

(Very different was the temper and career of his friend, Addison, who by his literary talent rose to be Secretary of State, and married the Countess of Warwick.) Addison was regarded, in his own day, as a great scholar, whose Latin verses were second only

to Virgil's. He was also a dramatist and produced a play which dealt with the Roman hero, Cato, and was hailed with great respect. He was a poet, too, and his poem on the campaign of the Duke of Marlborough was felt to be a model of heroic verse in the reign of Queen Anne, though it is not much admired to-day. (It is as the joint author, with Steele, of the *Tatler*, the *Spectator* and the *Guardian* that Addison is really entitled to fame.)

(Before we can fully understand the value and importance of these papers we must remind ourselves of three things: first, that, with the exception of Defoe's stories, there were hardly any novels to read in the days of Queen Anne; secondly, that there were hardly any newspapers that were not entirely given up to politics; thirdly, that although there were many learned books and solemn treatises, there were no graceful and amusing essays which could instruct without growing serious, and deal with everyday matters without becoming trivial.)

Thus it happened that when Addison and Steele issued first, the *Tatler*, and then the *Spectator*, and promised to discuss questions of taste and manners, art and morals, and topics of interest to everyone, and showed that they could do this in an amusing and instructive manner, they were very warmly welcomed. Each number of the *Spectator* contained a single essay and the numbers appeared daily. In many of the essays a gay and graceful manner concealed a serious purpose; for the essayists were very much in earnest in their desire to raise the manners and morals of society, not by formal sermons, but by more attractive methods. (They introduced pleasant stories into their

essays and invented character sketches. They described visits to the playhouse or the opera, reported imaginary conversations, and answered imaginary letters. In some essays, they openly ridiculed absurd fashions and absurd people, such as fops and affected ladies; in others, they praised good sense and good breeding.)

Addison wrote a series of papers on Milton, in which he pointed out the merits of *Paradise Lost*, and so great was his authority as a critic that it became fashionable to read Milton. But the chief glory of the *Spectator* is the figure of Sir Roger de Coverley, the



ADDISON.

country squire and Justice of the Peace, whose eccentricities only made him more beloved. The essays which tell of the knight's visit to the theatre and to Westminster Abbey, his behaviour in church or on the bench, his encounter with the gipsies, or the affection of his servants, were read with the utmost delight when they appeared, as they are still read to-day. The death of Sir Roger reduced the fashionable world to tears, for the essay which describes it is a masterpiece. (Steele's share in the *Spectator* was not less than

Addison's. He had naturally more gaiety of spirit than his friend, who was accused of being shy, pompous and conceited. Steele's papers are marked by a warm-heartedness which was peculiarly his own. In Thackeray's novel, *Henry Esmond*, you will find a vivid picture of the writers of Queen Anne's reign, and you will notice how much Thackeray delighted in Steele and how deeply he disliked Swift.)

(There were other contributors to the *Spectator*, and soon there were many rival papers. Addison and Steele had set a fashion in essay writing which has never died away.)

II.

Between the writers of Queen Anne's reign and the next great figure in literature is a space of twenty years. Samuel Johnson was born in Lichfield in 1709, the year in which Pope published his earliest poems. Pope died in 1744, when Johnson was thirty-five and was slowly making his way to fame. By this time Addison and Steele were dead, and Swift sunk in madness, but the literature which these men had made lived on and was held in the highest esteem. Pope was regarded as the perfect poet, whom it would be difficult to equal. The heroic couplet was still the ruling metre and correctness the highest praise. Such was the belief of the majority, but there were some who rebelled against this belief, and refused to regard the poetry of Pope and his followers as the best possible kind of poetry. Signs of revolt were becoming more and more frequent. One of these signs was a growing love of Nature, which was like a fresh breeze blowing through a cold, airless room. Another sign was the

new interest men were beginning to show in the earlier forms of English literature, such as the old folk ballads. There is a very strong contrast in form and feeling between the folk ballad and eighteenth century poetry. The one is direct and simple, the other elaborate and elegant. The ballads had seemed to eighteenth century taste awkward and childish, but the power to judge them more truly was slowly coming back. Blank verse was heard again, and a fresh lyric music. Devotion to reason and common sense was waning, and their place in poetry was beginning to be taken by feelings of awe and mystery, and a sense of pleasure in unseen things.

But these changes were slow and below the surface. Few people were aware of their presence, and fewer still realized their meaning or foresaw that they were to bring about the overthrow of the prevailing fashion in literature. (Dr. Johnson was not one of these few people. (He believed in the ruling fashion and he did not perceive all the changes that were coming about, and he did not approve of those which he was aware of ; and so it happens that his is the last great voice to speak in the tones and accents of the eighteenth century. But although he spoke in the tones and upheld the literary beliefs of his time, he is greater than the age in which he lived, and is, like Shakespeare, "for all time.")

In his later years Johnson was known as "the great Dr. Johnson." He ruled like a kindly tyrant over his circle of friends, men who were themselves famous in learning and art. He received homage not only from the "little scotch cur who was always at his heels," but from Edmund Burke, Sir Joshua Reynolds, Oliver

Goldsmith and other great men, from at least one charming and lively little authoress, and from several learned "blue-stockings." But his earlier years were full of bitter struggles. Though all his life a lover of genial friends and the pleasures of good talk, he was often cut off from the rest of the world by



DR. JOHNSON.

a cloud of black misery and desperate gloom of spirit. He suffered from poverty which stung his proud spirit, and the knowledge that he was possessed of extraordinary mental powers and rare learning, made it hard for him to suffer rich or idle folk gladly.

His father, who was a bookseller in the cathedral

town of Lichfield, cared for learning, and sent his son to a Grammar School, where he soon distinguished himself by his knowledge of Latin. Johnson was an ungainly figure, very short-sighted and with a curious rolling gait, but his astonishing vigour of mind made him a hero among his school-fellows. Even as a boy he had the gift of "tearing the heart out of a book"; he had a splendid memory and a strong understanding.

Books were his delight and he read widely, finding in his father's shop strange old folios, which he devoured. He went up to Oxford possessed of an amazing amount of knowledge, and spent his time there pursuing his own studies and entertaining other students with his conversation; but he suffered bitterly and angrily from lack of money. He could not afford to remain at Oxford, and went home to act as usher in a school—an experience he heartily disliked.

He married and opened a school of his own, but although his reputation as a scholar was already widely known in his own neighbourhood, he had very few pupils. One of his pupils, David Garrick, afterwards most famous as an actor, became his friend, and when Johnson gave up his school and set out for London, David Garrick went with him. In later days, when both these men were famous, Johnson used to like to say that he came up to London with twopence halfpenny in his pocket, and Garrick with three halfpence. Johnson had brought a tragedy, *Irene*, to London in the hope of having it produced, but at first the great city was not kind to him. In the life which he afterwards wrote of his friend, Richard Savage, he has drawn a grim picture of the underworld of poverty and distress, where the wretched hack-writers lived, and tried with poor success to make a living by their pens. (Johnson knew what it meant to live in this underworld, and he had great pity for those who were condemned to stay there. He himself had too much power in him to remain long unrecognized.) A grave and stately poem, which he wrote on London, attracted the attention of good critics, but the famous couplet with which the poem closes shows

how bitter had been the struggles of its author, and the last line was, by his request, printed in capital letters—

“This mournful truth is everywhere confessed,
SLOW RISES WORTH BY POVERTY DEPRESSED.”

He had many years of labour before him, and his rewards did not come quickly nor easily. In 1747 he determined to undertake the tremendous task of making a new English dictionary, and, for eight years, he worked on at a labour which no single man, save himself, could have carried through. The great lexicographer, as he came to be called, was heartily tired of his task before he finished it, for he hated the exertion of writing, and all his life he had to force himself to write when he would much rather have enjoyed himself “tearing the heart out of his books,” or leading the conversation among his friends. But he worked hard. He wrote for the Press, and produced a paper of his own which he called the *Rambler*, and another called the *Idler*. These papers were after the model of the *Spectator*, but Johnson had a heavier hand than Addison. His tone was magisterial, and he delivered his opinions like a judge passing sentence. He formed a habit of using long words, many of them drawn from the Latin language, and he also imitated the long balanced sentences or periods which were more natural to Latin prose than to English. No one could be more direct and vigorous in speech than Dr. Johnson when he desired to be so, and it is a mistake to think that his prose style was always heavily weighted. On the other hand, it is easy to see what Oliver Goldsmith meant when he told his friend, that if he (Dr. Johnson) had had to write a fable about little

fishes, he would have made the little fishes talk like whales.)

In 1759 Johnson wrote a tale called *Rasselas*—but he wrote like a philosopher, not like a novelist. His story tells of Rasselas, a prince of Abyssinia, and his search for happiness, and it is both wise and sad.

When George III became king, Johnson received a pension of £300, and was thus freed from the need to earn his bread by writing. He was now able to lead the life he liked best—to spend many hours in reading, to appear at the famous club and rule the talk among his friends who met there, to drive to Oxford and converse with learned dons, or to Lichfield, where he received the homage of his old friends. Once he went to France with his friends, the Thrales; and once his faithful follower, Boswell, persuaded him to visit Scotland and led him proudly as far as the Hebrides. But the place that Johnson loved best was London, for there, he said, a man could “store his mind.” “Sir,” he said to Boswell, “when a man is tired of London he is tired of life; for there is in London all that life can afford.”

Johnson had little patience with lovers of Nature or solitude. He craved for the presence of his friends, for when he was alone gloomy fears visited him. He liked to hear the sound of human voices, and he enjoyed the excitement of discussing, and arguing, and matching his wits against all who came to dispute. He was a tremendous fighter with words, and few could stand up for long against his amazing knowledge, ready wit, penetrating reason and vigorous command of language. He could argue on any side, and when he was anxious to gain the victory he did not spare his

adversary for, as one of his friends justly remarked, if he missed fire with his pistol, he discharged the butt end of it at his foe.

(It has been said that Johnson is better remembered by what he said than by what he wrote.) We must therefore be very grateful to the devoted Boswell, who, in spite of many rebuffs, adopted Dr. Johnson as his special hero, and took down notes in writing of many of the conversations at which he assisted. In Boswell's *Life of Johnson*—one of the most famous books in our literature, we find a living picture of Johnson and his circle of friends, and we can still hear him talk with them. Boswell was not a great man; he was often affected and ridiculous, and was at first admitted to Johnson's friendship on sufferance. But he was devoted and diligent in his admiration of Johnson. He studied him with extraordinary zeal, collected all possible information about him, treasured his opinions, provoked him to discuss all manner of topics, dogged his footsteps, and took note of all that he did. To this zeal for collecting material, Boswell added the power of sifting and arranging his matter so as best to present a living picture of his hero. Dr. Johnson had many strange tricks of manner and Boswell records them all very carefully, but he is careful to record, as well, more important things—the prayers that Johnson wrote in his Journal and the record of his struggles for peace of mind—his generosity—his grief at the loss of friends—his uprightness—his hatred of cant and dishonesty. We see Johnson angry at some fancied slight or basking in the attentions of his friends, assuming the air of the lawgiver and discomfiting some offender who rashly opposed his opinions; but

we also see him returning home to the strange household of waifs and strays whom he supported, to gratify, with his company, an obscure and blind old lady whom Boswell declared to be both peevish and tedious. Boswell is not afraid to paint the faults of his hero, for he knew that in doing so he took nothing away from his true worth. It is impossible not to respect Johnson, and the bearishness of manner, which frightened away strangers, did not prevent his friends from loving him. If among strangers the learned doctor stood firmly on his dignity, among his young friends he was always ready for a frolic. "Sir," he once said, "I love the acquaintance of young people; because in the first place I don't like to think myself growing old . . . and then, Sir, young men have more virtue than old men, they have more generous sentiments in every respect. I love the young dogs of this age, they have more wit and humour and knowledge of life than we had; but then, the dogs are not such good scholars."

In 1779, Johnson was induced to begin his last and most valuable work, *Lives of the Most Eminent English Poets*. All his life Johnson had been interested in the lives of men of letters, and had gathered great stores of information about them. The London booksellers, who wished to make a new edition of the works of the English poets, could think of no one so fitted to write an account of the lives of the poets as Dr. Johnson. They called on him and begged him to undertake the work, and he, knowing that there need be no drudgery for him in writing such a work, agreed to do so. In *The Lives of the Poets*, Johnson is at his best. He was, above all, a moralist, that is to say, that he had always been concerned with questions of conduct. He was

deeply interested in the way in which men lived out their lives, and in the motives that might cause them to do good or evil actions. He had himself a very clear standard by which he judged good and evil. A wide experience of men, and a shrewd and splendid common sense governed his judgment. He loved humanity, but he did not expect too much from it. He condemned vice heartily, but he was always sorry for those with whom life had dealt hardly.

The *Lives of the Poets* is a book full of interest. Each life falls into two parts. The first tells the story of the poet's life, the second discusses the nature and value of his works. The first part will interest you most. The second part is of great interest to older students; for, in his judgment of the poetry of other writers, Johnson reveals his own likes and dislikes in poetry, and his taste in poetry was, you may remember, the taste of most of the men of his day. But you will remember also, that there were others who did not share his views, who did not think the poetry of Dryden and Pope the greatest kind of poetry, who were seeking to bring back to poetry that special kind of beauty, which the eighteenth century seemed, on the whole, to have rejected. You would not guess by reading the *Lives of the Poets* that such people existed, or that they were becoming more powerful and numerous; but you would easily realize that Johnson, and those who followed his judgment, could have had little ear for the music of any verse save that of the eighteenth century heroic couplet.

If Johnson hated a man's political opinions he was apt to hate the man, too. He could not forgive Milton for his share in the Commonwealth, and he could hear

no music in *Lycidas*. He had no idea that a renewed study of Milton's verse-music was already beginning to drive the heroic couplet from its proud position.

In the *Lives of the Poets*, you will find an account of some poets who lived in Johnson's own day and were known to him. Of these, the most important are James Thomson, William Collins and Thomas Gray, author of the *Elegy in a Country Churchyard*; and these three are important because each in his own way foreshadowed the revolt from eighteenth century poetry—Thomson, by his descriptions of nature, Collins, by his sensitive ear and feeling of awe in the presence of the unseen, Gray, by scholarly love for older literature.

There is no mention in the *Lives of the Poets* of one who was Johnson's great friend—Oliver Goldsmith. Goldsmith was born in Ireland in 1728, and educated at Dublin. His was an odd but lovable character. He was clumsy and unlucky, and always in some kind of difficulty. Whenever he had any money he squandered it in a perfectly irresponsible manner, and in the same way he wasted his time and talents, and very nearly failed to obtain his university degree; but he was a charming companion—generous, witty and full of gay spirits. He made vain efforts to gain a livelihood, and after journeying on foot through Europe, playing his flute and disputing with scholars, he settled in London. (He began to write essays, after the fashion of the *Spectator*, and became known to Johnson, who formed a high opinion of his powers, though Boswell, who was jealous of him, tried to pretend that he was only "an inspired oaf.") His poem, *The Traveller*, brought him fame, and in 1766

his novel, *The Vicar of Wakefield*, delighted everyone.)

(The Vicar of Wakefield, the hero of the story, became as great a favourite as Sir Roger de Coverley had been.) His learning and simplicity, his lack of worldly wisdom, his old-fashioned dignity, and, most



GOLDSMITH.

of all, his kindliness, which reflected the kindliness of his author, appealed to everyone. Goldsmith had just that sweetness of nature and gaiety of spirit, which can create characters who are at the same time laughable and admirable. The laughter he provokes is without bitterness, and

his wit plays tenderly over his characters, lighting up their foibles and their virtues.

The characters in *The Vicar of Wakefield* are for the most part simple country folk, who find in the country their duties and their happiness; the unhappiness that comes to them is the work of fashionable town folk, who break in upon their simplicity and spoil their innocence. (In his love for the simple dignity of country people and his belief in their natural goodness, Goldsmith differed from those eighteenth century writers who preferred to describe only the witty and fashionable people of the town.) In his poem, *The*

Deserted Village, Goldsmith shows us again the simple happiness of rustic folk, ruined by the cry of the rich for luxury. (He can also describe with graceful wit the life of the town) and in *The Citizen of the World* he invents a Chinese philosopher, who is on a visit to London and writes long letters to his friends in China, telling them all his strange experiences in the English capital. Goldsmith was quite sure that there was much in the behaviour of "the polite world" in London which would strike an intelligent stranger as highly ridiculous, and so he makes his Chinese philosopher describe, with grave and ironic politeness, the follies of politicians, clergymen, fine ladies, and fops. It is in these letters that we meet two famous characters—Beau Tibbs, the threadbare man of fashion, and the Man in Black, who is, in some ways, very much like the author himself. Goldsmith's prose is far more attractive to us than Dr. Johnson's. It is easy and graceful and full of witty and humorous turns of speech.

(It was in prose that Goldsmith wrote his two comedies, *The Good-natured Man* and *She Stoops to Conquer*.) (He, like other critics of his time, was very weary of the kind of comedy which then held the London stage—and he nicknamed it the "genteel comedy." Genteel or sentimental comedy was altogether too refined and too elevated to be either natural or amusing, and Goldsmith refused to copy its insipid fashion.) So the characters in *She Stoops to Conquer* are as unlike those in a genteel comedy as we can well imagine, and the scene is laid in an old rambling country house, whose owner is a lover of all old-fashioned things—"old friends, old times, old manners, old books, old wine." Tony Lumpkin, the young squire,

is an ignorant, rowdy, young rascal, full of animal spirits and mischievous tricks. The heroine is no vaporish young lady, but a lively, quick-witted girl, mistress of herself and the situation, and the whole comedy still lives and provokes our laughter by its wit and merriment.

(Although eighteenth century Londoners loved the theatre, and although there were great actors and actresses, and many new plays were written for them to act in, there were no great dramatic writers as there had been in the days of Elizabeth, or of the Restoration) With the exception of Goldsmith's comedies, and those even more brilliantly witty plays of his fellow-countryman, Sheridan, the eighteenth century added little to the history of English drama. (There was, however, another kind of literature in which it excelled—the novel.)

(The excellence of the novel in the eighteenth century is due to four great writers who took up the art of novel writing where Defoe had laid it down, who learnt from the eighteenth century essayists all that the essay could teach them, who developed and fashioned the novel each according to his own desires, and handed it on to the nineteenth century as one of the most powerful and interesting forms of English literature. These four men were Samuel Richardson, Henry Fielding, Laurence Sterne, and Tobias Smollett.) (I do not think that you will yet find much interest in the works of Richardson or Sterne.) Richardson's famous novels were written in the form of letters, in which each character describes with extreme precision, and in great detail, his or her experiences. Richardson managed this difficult method of writing a novel with

great ease. (His characters make themselves real and interesting, and though we may find the distress of Clarissa or the virtues of Pamela or the stateliness of Sir Charles Grandison a little tedious, Richardson's first readers revelled in them.)

(Fielding, who had a more robust nature and liked more full-blooded characters, laughed at Richardson and his excessive respect for convention, and he wrote his first novel—*Joseph Andrews*—in mockery of Richardson's *Pamela*. Fielding's best novel is called *Tom Jones*,) and many people have thought it the finest novel in the English language. Fielding was a scholar, and he was also a man who had a wide experience of life and had met men and women of all ranks. Out of his knowledge of the world he created a great throng of characters, country squires and country parsons, great ladies of fashion and their serving maids and footmen, country maids, young men of fortune, gaol birds, young ladies of charm and character. His scenes are laid in country houses and town houses, the hunting field or the masquerade, in the prison or on the great highways running to the western counties. The plots which contain these scenes and characters, are woven with the utmost skill. (Nowhere is there a clearer picture of life in the eighteenth century than in these novels, for Fielding drew life as he saw it and did not disguise human nature in false colours. He was both tolerant and ironic. He drew men and women who were coarse and brutal, mean or reckless, and he drew them powerfully, but he also gave us Parson Adams, Squire Allworthy, and Amelia—studies in the finest qualities of humanity.)

All our great novelists have studied Fielding's art.

Even as a small boy, Dickens loved his novels, and when he grew up and understood them more clearly, he learnt from them many lessons which he put into practice in his own novels. (Smollett, too, was a favourite with him, and he was not repelled by his



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rather savage sense of humour. Smollett's nature was harsher than Fielding's and his characters are often coarse and brutal, but his books are full of lively scenes and adventures, such as no one had thought of using in novels before Smollett's time, though many people copied them after him.)

(In Sterne, we have a novelist full of odd mannerisms and affectations, telling his story in a leisurely way, writing down all the queer fancies that started

into his witty brain and holding imaginary conversations with his readers.) He was a clergyman, though a strange one, and a taste for unsavoury jesting disfigures his works, but *Tristram Shandy* and *A Sentimental Journey* had a great vogue in their day and helped the novel to become more and more popular.

Besides these four great novel writers, there was a host of lesser novelists; some of them, like Mme. D'Arblay, Johnson's friend, based their stories on the lives of the men and women they observed around them; some of them, like Mackenzie, wrote sentimental novels, with sentimental heroes and heroines. Sobs and sighs and tears were the chief interest of the story. Others again, like Horace Walpole, Mrs. Radcliffe, and Maturin, dealt in all sorts of supernatural horrors—ruined castles, haunted chambers, beckoning ghosts, and the wind howling at night along the dark corridors, where the heroine steals on, carrying a lamp which is sure to be extinguished.

(By the end of the eighteenth century the novel was firmly established as literature. It was looked on with suspicion by some, who did not believe that literature should deal with scenes or characters drawn from low life, however well the novelist might handle them; and in many houses the novel was forbidden to women and children. But when the next age came, new masters took up the art of writing novels, and Sir Walter Scott first, and after him Dickens, Thackeray, George Eliot and many others found a way to win the love and admiration of all men, women and children.)

CHAPTER IX.

THE ROMANTIC POETS.

YOU will remember that, at the end of the eighteenth century, many people were dissatisfied with the kind of poetry their fathers had most admired. These people hoped for poets who would give them a new poetry, who would speak with new music and deeper feeling, who would find a place for those things that had been neglected—the love of nature and solitude, the hopes and fears of simple people, passionate feelings, romantic love, rapture in the presence of beauty, and awe and wonder in the presence of strange things dimly seen.

Poets came who gave all these things to poetry—Wordsworth, Coleridge, Byron, Keats, Shelley. They are called the Romantic Poets, because they put behind them the shrewd and reasonable poetry of the eighteenth century, and filled their work with romantic beauty. But before these entirely romantic poets came their forerunners—poets who belonged in spirit partly to the old order of the eighteenth century, and partly to the new order of the nineteenth century. Gray, Collins, and Thomson were the forerunners of the romantic poets, and so, too, was the young poet Chatterton, who loved the earlier English poetry and wrote in imitation of Chaucer, pretending that his poems had really been written in the fourteenth and fifteenth centuries. But there were four poets who were nearer to the spirit of the new poetry—

William Cowper, George Crabbe, Robert Burns, and William Blake.

In Cowper's poetry at its best we find a deep, watchful love of Nature—of the sounds and sights of the country, the colours and forms of the landscape, the changing seasons and the small creatures that lived in woods and gardens. This poet had suffered much in his early life; he was subject to attacks of madness and had been shut up, away from his fellow creatures. He tells us this in his poem *The Task*, where he speaks of himself as a stricken deer—

“I was a stricken deer that left the herd
Long since; with many an arrow deep infixed
My side was charged, when I withdrew
To seek a tranquil death in distant shades.
There was I found by One who had Himself
Been hurt by archers.”

In the country, with devoted friends, he found a peaceful refuge. Town life and the world of fashion were distasteful to him. He preferred the quiet happiness of his home in Huntingdonshire or Buckinghamshire, spending his days in walking in the pleasant countryside, reading his books, and in winter evenings sitting by the glowing hearth, joining in cheerful talk with his friends.

His poetry, most of which was written after he was fifty years old, reflects very clearly his gentle pleasures, for he made them the substance of his poetry. Cowper was not one of those who admired the poetry of Pope and his followers. To his ear, Pope's verses sounded artificial and without music. He much preferred the music of Milton's poetry, and so we find that Cowper

uses blank verse in the best of his longer poems. It is true that he also made use of the heroic couplet, and that he wrote much poetry in the cold, moralizing strain which had been popular in the eighteenth century, but when we read the finest passages in *The Task*, *Yardley Oak*, and many of his shorter poems, we



WILLIAM COWPER.

realize that Cowper belonged, in spirit, to the new poetry which Wordsworth was to write, and not to the old school of Pope.

Cowper was a great lover of trees. You can find in his poetry many passages in which he shows how deeply he felt the beauty of their changing forms. The felling of his favourite trees was a great grief to him. *The Poplar Field*

shows how much their death moved him. He took a great pleasure in his garden and his three tame hares who lived there, and when one of them died he wrote a charming ode in honour of his "old Tiney, surliest of his kind." Another of his poems tells of three kittens and the full-grown cat, and their surprise at the sight of a viper. We do not find in Cowper's poetry the passion and the power that Shelley, Keats and Byron give to their poetry; but there is much that is tender and moving, as we realize when we read the poem written when his

mother's portrait was sent to him, or *My Mary*. Cowper wrote a great many hymns and, even in the poems that are not hymns, we feel how vividly his religion lived and worked in him. *The Loss of the Royal George* has a stately simplicity and bare grandeur which impress us more than many words could do.

In a merry mood, Cowper wrote the famous poem *John Gilpin*, and filled all who read it with delight, so that everyone was ready to echo the last verse—

“ Now let us sing, long live the King !
And Gilpin, long live he !
And when he next doth ride abroad
May I be there to see ! ”

While Cowper was busy in Buckinghamshire working at *The Task*, a younger poet, in a remote village on the east coast of Suffolk, was also at work describing with painful care the country which he knew best and the people who lived there. This was George Crabbe (1754–1832). The country which Crabbe knew was not like the generous, wooded country where Cowper lived. It was harsh and bleak, and the people who lived there were grim and poverty stricken.

Poets who lived in London, might write light-heartedly of what they imagined to be the joys of country life. They might write of the charming, rosy-cheeked shepherd boy piping to his flocks, his only care to please his dainty roguish shepherdess ; but their knowledge of shepherds and shepherdesses was very slight indeed, and their pictures of them as little like reality as Dresden china figures, or the great ladies of the French Court, who used to amuse themselves by dressing up as shepherdesses.

Crabbe, who lived in the country, knew how false these poetic pictures were, and in his efforts to be very truthful he seems to have described only the more cheerless side of village life—its squalid poverty, and its morose inhabitants. Instead of rich waving cornfields, he shows us the poor fruits of a thin soil, thistles instead of roses, ragged infants and hungry boys, instead of rosy, smiling children. Crabbe's honesty makes his poetry interesting. He makes us see exactly what he saw in the village—broken-down cottages, almshouses, sick beds. It has been said of him, that no clerk going into a room to make a catalogue of the articles in it, could give us a more accurate account of it than Crabbe does in his verses. But we expect a poet to see more than all the objects in a room—we expect him to see the meaning or significance behind their appearance, to see, not only with his eyes, but with his mind's eye, or imagination. If he can do this he will not describe each thing that he finds in the room, because he will know that for him, and for his purpose, some things have more meaning, and are more important than others. His imagination will tell him which are the important things, and when he comes to make a picture of the room in his mind, he will furnish it only with those things that have enough meaning to make them worth while. Crabbe does not really let his imagination play over the scenes he wishes to describe, or the stories he has to tell. Often he has the air of a reporter rather than a poet; sometimes he is wearisome because he *must* tell us every single detail, and his verse is often like the sober, jogging pace of a steady-going cart-horse. Sometimes, however, he uses his metre—the heroic couplet—

with vigour, and the sharp precision of his rhyme pulls his poetry together and prevents it from going straggling on.

The best known of Crabbe's early poems is *The Village*, and there is a gap of many years between his early and later poems. Crabbe was born in 1754. He lived to see the rise of the new school of poetry, outlived three of its most famous poets, Byron, Keats, and Shelley, and died in the same year as Sir Walter Scott. We can see in his later poems *Tales* and *Tales of the Hall*, that, with the exception of Scott and Wordsworth, the poetry of the younger poets had little influence on his work. He went on in his own way, still using the favourite metre of the eighteenth century, still very sober though rather more cheerful in tone, full of good sense with occasional gleams of humour, rarely at all excited, and rarely very musical.

Very different, in all ways, from Crabbe's poems are the songs of Robert Burns. Their warmth, their lilt, their swift tenderness, make them so lovely that any description of them must sound clumsy. They are to be read and sung, over and over again.

Burns was the son of a poor Scots farmer, who had to struggle late and early to make a living out of his farm. From his early days Burns worked on the land, and, as he grew older, helped in the ploughing and sowing, and in looking after the beasts. His father, like many others of his time and race, was a lover of good literature, and his sons were sent to the village school, where they learnt to read English; and in the winter evenings they read together Shakespeare and Pope, the *Spectator*, and other books of prose and poetry. As Burns grew up the old Scots airs filled his ears with music,

and he used to hum them over to himself, and fit words to them ; sometimes he used some of the old words which had been sung in Scotland for many years ; sometimes he gave new words to the old tunes, choosing for his themes his own moods—delight in love and the happy spring weather, or sadness and wintry cold.

The time which could be spared from hard farm labour was given to reading and practising poetry, or



ROBERT BURNS.

to dancing and pleasure, for Burns and his brother thought little of walking the long Scots miles on a winter evening to reach the barn, lighted with candles, where the young people of the district met to dance together. Burns was a favourite at such gatherings. He had wit and fire and zest. Like many high-spirited boys, he was quick to resent any check on his freedom

of speech and action, and very soon he made enemies among the strict Scots ministers, who tried to rule youth with an iron hand. Burns defied them and his defiance took a practical form. He added to his song writing biting satiric poems, which held up his enemies to everlasting laughter. In *The Holy Fair* he attacked their hypocrisy, and their ranting, ignorant sermons, in which they tried to frighten people, and then he dismissed them and their works with a good-tempered, contemptuous gibe. All his life he despised

deceit and wrote verses in scorn of hypocrites. Often reckless and foolish himself, he had a native pride and honesty which would not let him pretend to be better than he was. He admired in others the qualities he lacked, and in *The Cottar's Saturday Night* he draws a moving picture of the home-coming of the toil-worn labourer, and the simple, happy dignity with which he rules his family, and teaches them truth and honesty.

Compare this poem with Crabbe's descriptions of a village home, and you will see that, although both poets make poor and simple folk the theme of their poems, they have very different points of view.

Besides his songs and his satires and his serious poems, Burns wrote many letters or epistles in verse to his friends, in which he showed a happy humour and a command of vivid, striking phrases. His *Jolly Beggars* is a vivid picture of the carousings of a band of wandering beggars, and the story of Tam O'Shanter and his good mare Maggie, and their escape from the heathen witches, has delighted thousands.

After his father's death Burns did not find life easy. He was aware of his own power as a poet and had hopes of fame, but his private affairs grew worse and worse, and, in 1786, he decided to emigrate to Jamaica. While he was at Kilmarnock, actually waiting to set sail, a friend of his persuaded him to print and publish his poems. He did so, and at once became famous. All thoughts of Jamaica were given up and Burns, everywhere hailed as poet, was invited to Edinburgh to meet learned men and lords there.

The story of his visit there, of his return home, of his high hopes and his disappointment, has been told

by a fellow countryman, Thomas Carlyle. In Carlyle's essay on Burns you can read the end of the tragedy, and among Burns's poems you will find one which the poet wrote as a fit inscription for his own grave.

Although Burns was not an English poet, and although his best verse is written in his native language, he is one of those who foreshadowed the coming of the English romantic poets, and he had some share of their spirit. Like them, he was sensitive to the beauty of the country ; he shared their friendliness towards animals and their belief that manhood is more worthy of reverence than rank or title. And above all, the music of his poetry is clear and fresh, and he is moved to song by his own emotions, and his desire to utter them.

The last of our four poets, William Blake, was the most remarkable of them all, though he was very little spoken of in his own day. When Blake was a child he saw angels passing to and fro among haymakers in a field, and throughout his life he was able to see visions unseen by other men. Blake believed in his visions ; to him they were more real than the everyday world about him. Not only did he write of them in poetry, he was an artist and could draw in long, sweeping, powerful lines the figures that came to him in his visions. His poetry was very different from the poetry of his day. He worshipped imagination and hated reason, and he wrote many long poems inspired by visions and full of prophecies. But you will like best those *Songs of Innocence*, which he made in honour of children—

“ the happy songs
Every child may joy to hear.”

He sings of happy children at play, of the little chimney sweeper dreaming, of the little boy lost and found, of children singing in church, in just such words as children can like and understand. In his *Songs of Experience*, the children's world is a sadder place, for the poet is thinking of the evil things that may enter there. Among the *Songs of Experience* you will find the famous poem called *The Tiger*, full of the tremendous vigour which possessed Blake, and was subdued by him into poetry that takes your breath away.

III.

And now we come to that group of poets who filled the early years of the nineteenth century with new poetry. They are sometimes called the Romantic Poets, or the Poets of the Romantic Revolt, and although they are not each "romantic" in the same way, they have much in common with each other, and much that separates them from the poets of the eighteenth century. Each in his own way shows the full flowering of the new spirit that had been working in literature since the reign of Pope.

Yet, in spite of this fact, the work of the young Romantic Poets was not very much liked at first, and the men who liked it least were the powerful critics who ruled public opinion by means of such Reviews as the *Quarterly* or the *Edinburgh Review*. These critics favoured the poetry of the eighteenth century very strongly, and they were hot in anger that any young poet should dare to attack it; and when Wordsworth and Coleridge ventured to do so, the critics treated them as though they were either criminal, or lunatic.

The volume which so angered the reviewers was a small book of poems called *Lyrical Ballads*, which appeared in 1798, and was reprinted in 1801 with a long prose preface by Wordsworth. To this small volume we now look back with affection and respect, for it was like a standard of rebellion raised by a gallant little band against great odds.

To understand clearly how the *Lyrical Ballads* came to be written, and what their purpose was, we must know something of the experiences of the poets who made them.

Wordsworth was born in Cumberland in 1770. Brought up in a region of lakes and mountains, he came to love Nature passionately. At first his love was like that of any healthy country lad—running and leaping along the hillsides and making the lakes echo with his shouts. Gradually a deeper feeling took possession of him, and often he was almost frightened by the power which the lakes and mountains had over him. It was not merely because of their loveliness of shape and colour that they haunted him, but because he felt that beneath their outward beauty a living spirit breathed—the spirit which had shaped their loveliness, and which also gave life to men. From this spirit men drew all that was noblest in them, and it was Wordsworth's belief that it was easier for man to feel the presence of the spirit, and draw closer to it, in the country than in the crowded town. In the tranquil country, he thought, the voice of Nature could speak to hearts who had time to listen, but in the town men's minds were distracted by feverish desires and their eagerness to become great in the eyes of their fellows. In his opinion, the old shepherd, who had lived out his

days close to Nature, had more wisdom and dignity than the powerful politician; for Nature could teach the hearts of those that loved her.

The thoughts and feelings of the shepherd, and his simple speech were to Wordsworth profoundly interesting. To his mind they were more suited to be the theme of poetry than the experiences of the town-dweller, because they were more simple, direct, and natural, and therefore more moving. So in his *Lyrical Ballads*, he deliberately chose to describe events in the simple life of rustic folk, and he tried to describe them as far as possible in their simple speech. You can imagine how puzzled and angry the critics would be, for most of them were accustomed to think that in poetry a special kind of language was required, artificial and high-sounding, and quite unlike the natural speech of a natural person.

But you must not suppose that the *Lyrical Ballads* were the first of Wordsworth's poems, or that he arrived at his beliefs about nature and man without a great deal of perplexity and even distress of mind. He was sent, when he was eighteen years old, to Cambridge, but he seems to have been restless and unhappy there. Like all young ardent spirits, his eyes were fixed on France, where the French people were struggling to wrest some degree of liberty from rulers who had oppressed them long and bitterly. Like almost all the romantic poets, Wordsworth was on the side of the people of France, and desperately anxious that their cause should be victorious. He travelled in France, and shared with the French people their hope that the new French Republic was to give liberty and happiness, first to France and then to Europe. He was utterly

dismayed when his dream was shattered, when England declared war against the Republic, and France herself forgot her ideals.

His disappointment filled him with gloom. Neither nature nor poetry could console him, and it was many months before he regained his peace of mind. That he did so was due to the healing influence of his sister Dorothy, and her love of nature.

Together they settled in Dorset and afterwards at Alfoxden in Somerset, and Dorothy Wordsworth, who was as sensitive to beauty as her brother and had an eye as keen as any poet, helped to restore to her brother his belief in human nature. Dorothy has left us in her *Journal* a record of those happy months, and a picture of her own vivid nature. You will find in *Tintern Abbey* lines which show how Wordsworth loved her, to which you can add another of his descriptions of her—

“ Her voice was like a hidden bird that sings,
The thought of her was like a flash of light,
Or an unseen companionship, a breath
Of fragrance independent of the wind.”

It was in Dorset that Wordsworth and Coleridge met (1795) and entered upon the friendship that produced the *Lyrical Ballads*. At that time Coleridge was twenty-three years old, and had perhaps the most brilliantly gifted mind in England. His friend, Charles Lamb, who was his school mate at Christ's Hospital, described him, when still a school boy, expounding with eloquence the mysteries of Greek philosophy. Hazlitt, who first met him in 1798, was entranced by the torrent of learning and eloquence

which fell from his lips, and added to all his other gifts was the gift of poetry.

It is not surprising that Wordsworth and Coleridge became friends. They shared the same views in politics and in poetry. Each was a lover of Nature, though Coleridge, I think, was more sensitive than his friend to the beauty of colour. Each was impressed with the dignity of simple people and their emotions, and each was weary of the cold, unfeeling poetry of the day. Coleridge had always loved strange tales in which the invisible world becomes for a time visible, and it was agreed that his poems in the *Lyrical Ballads* were to deal with the supernatural, while Wordsworth's poems were to deal with matters of everyday interest.

So Wordsworth wrote about Harry Gill and Goody Blake, Simon Lee and the Idiot Boy, and was heartily laughed at; and Coleridge wrote the *Rime of the Ancient Mariner*, and there were very few who found either music or magic in it.

We still smile at the worst of Wordsworth's poems because, instead of being simple and dignified, they are bald and the rhymes sound rather silly; but the best of them, such as *Lines Written to his Sister, Michael*, the *Brothers*, and others, which you can find for yourself, are true and great poetry. As for the *Lines Written a Few Miles Above Tintern Abbey*, "dull would he be of soul," who could not feel their power and beauty.

Coleridge, always more ready to make plans than to carry them out, wrote only three poems—but one of them was *The Ancient Mariner*, perfect in colour and music, holding us enthralled by the strange simplicity of its unearthly story just as the Wedding Guest was held. Very few modern poets have been able to

describe the supernatural so as to make it seem real and impressive. Some writers have tried to do this by piling horror on horror, as though we could be forced into believing in their ghosts and unearthly spirits. But in *The Ancient Mariner*, Coleridge has handled his spirit world with such delicate and vivid imagination that he has made it real and lovely. This power of making the unreal seem real is one of the marks of the romantic poets. Coleridge, Shelley and Keats had the largest share of this gift and Coleridge was the first to give proofs of it. In his unfinished poem, *Christabel*, he makes us breathe in an air laden with magic and witchery, and the poem itself is as beautiful as moonlight. In this poem Coleridge made use of an old metre in such a wonderful manner, as to give to English literature one of its most musical measures.

Christabel, though written in the days of the *Lyrical Ballads*, was not published till 1816, but it was well known to Coleridge's friends, who urged him in vain to finish it, and among those who heard it at second hand was Sir Walter Scott, who was so impressed by the metre in which it was written, that he wrote his first long poem in imitation of it. Coleridge left many things unfinished, and as he left youth behind him, it became clear that he would never do anything worthy of his great genius. He turned from one pursuit to another, working brilliantly but unsteadily, and without sufficient will-power to do justice to himself. Yet his lectures on Shakespeare contained the finest and truest things that had yet been said in England, and inspired a new understanding of Shakespeare. His written criticisms on his own poetry and on Wordsworth's were as far above the level of the

reviewers of the day as his poetry was beyond their understanding. But his will was weak and his brilliance was wasted. He began to take opium and had to be rescued from himself by the kindness of his friends. Though he ceased to write, he never ceased to talk, and his influence on the minds of those who came to listen to him was unbounded. His friend, Charles Lamb, described him as "an archangel a little damaged," and there could be no better description than his.

Wordsworth's lot was very different. After the first volume of the *Lyrical Ballads* had been printed, he and his sister returned to the Lakes and settled at Grasmere. Here he gave himself up to the service of poetry, as a priest devotes himself to the service of his God. Growing calmer and more steadfast as years went on, he still found his happiness in Nature and the affection of his family. In 1807 he published a volume of poetry, but he left unpublished a poem called *The Prelude*, in which he had described the growth of his own soul. *The Prelude*, written in blank verse, has passages of great beauty, and, like all Wordsworth's longer poems, it has also passages that are dull and flat. For Wordsworth was quite sure that it was the duty of the poet to teach moral truths, and he insisted on doing so. Strangely enough, Wordsworth does not seem to have known when he was spoiling his poem by adding dull and prosy reflections. He could write a simple poem and make it utterly perfect, and he could write another poem without a touch of grace. In his finest blank verse and sonnets he has a majestic beauty that reminds us of Milton, but all his poetry is not of this quality. His industry was very great

and he produced a vast quantity of verse. He outlived the young romantic poets and saw the triumph of the romantic movement. Instead of being severely censured for his poetry, he came to be highly praised, and young poets visited him to offer their homage to the sage.

You will find in a selection made by Matthew Arnold the best of Wordsworth's poetry—and when you have read this you will perhaps realize why Matthew Arnold, himself a poet and a scholar, ranked Wordsworth as the third greatest English poet. Wordsworth died in 1850, but we have still to consider those poets who began to write only a few years later than the poets of the *Lyrical Ballads*.

To Sir Walter Scott, romance meant the world of the Middle Ages, a world full of high adventure. He was passionately interested in its literature and especially in folk ballads. In the latter half of the eighteenth century scholars had begun to take a timid interest in ballads, and a collection had been made by Bishop Percy. But Scott had a much finer and stronger taste for ballads than Percy. He knew the country folk who still sang the old ballads, and he used to ride through the Border country to hear them sing, and to take down from their mouths the words which they had heard from their fathers, who, in turn, had had them from their fathers before them. The true spirit of the Middle Ages lived on in these ballads, and they were precious to Scott, who saved them for us. In 1802 he published a collection of folk ballads, adding to them some modern ballads which show how difficult it is for anyone in modern times to recapture the true ballad feeling. Scott went on studying the literature

of the Middle Ages. He read not only all the old romances, the prose and poetry of the Middle Ages, but he also studied books and documents which were not really literature, but threw light on the life and customs of the people of those days. Thus he could call up in his mind the world of the Middle Ages, and the men and women who played their part in it. He knew exactly how they would look and what they would wear. He could see their armour, their castles, their tournaments, the halls where their minstrels sang, and the ladies who listened ; and this was the world which he re-created for his fellow men, first in long poetic lays or romances, and then in the famous *Waverley Novels*.

The Lay of the Last Minstrel (1805) was the first of the poems. It was written in the metre of *Christabel*, and was a story of knightly days of love and fighting, of a moonlit abbey, wizardry, and an elfin page. It had neither the delicate music nor the magic of *Christabel*, but it was a good, stirring tale, and delighted the public, who were anxious to hear more of an age whose romantic charm had been so long forgotten.

The grandeur of the Scottish scenery, which Scott described in his poetry, reminded people that there was beauty in the loneliest parts of the country, that mountain scenery and wild moorlands stirred up deeper feelings than trim walks and city gardens. And so Scott went on writing his romantic lays till another poet arose and caught the ear of the public. This was Lord Byron.

Byron was certainly a striking figure. He had had a stormy, bitter childhood and then liberty to do as he liked. He entered a society that flattered him and

was impressed by his air of haughty melancholy. He had proved his satiric wit by a fierce attack on the reviewers, and when in 1812 he published the first part of *Childe Harold* he became the poetic idol of the day.



BYRON.

The hero of the poem, *Childe Harold*, is a young man who has spent his youth in wild follies. A time comes when even pleasures cease to please him. He becomes stern and melancholy, borne down with a strange weariness of spirit. He leaves England and wanders through Spain and Greece, fired with indignation

by the signs of tyranny, or filled with admiration for deeds of heroism, but always relapsing into mysterious gloom.

The vigour of Byron's descriptions and the fascinating melancholy of his hero, his defiant air and passionate utterances thrilled his readers. Byronic melancholy became the fashion, and in most of Byron's poems we

have a figure like Childe Harold, and whether the hero is called Lara or the Corsair, he is really Byron, as he liked to imagine himself.

In 1816 Byron left England, angry at his fall from favour. He added a second part to *Childe Harold*, and described the field of Waterloo, the scenery of Switzerland and the Italian cities. But his descriptions are not mere descriptions, they are charged with passionate feelings. Intense feeling, and the desire to reveal such emotion by means of poetry were marks of the romantic poets. Byron has been accused of posing, of pretending to be romantic, and in his last poem, *Don Juan*, there is far more wit than melancholy; but there is no doubt that he was capable of passion, that he had a melancholy and defiant spirit and the power to express his emotion in ringing verse.

Byron died fighting for the independence of the Greeks, nearly two years after the death of Shelley, a fellow poet, and exile.

Of all the romantic poets, Shelley was most bitterly attacked. This need not surprise us when we remember that Shelley's beliefs outraged public opinion. He believed that the government, the church, and society in general were evil to the core, and that those who obeyed their laws became either tyrants and monsters, or enfeebled slaves. He believed passionately that man was by nature good, and would become perfect, if only he were left free to develop according to his own nature. This he could never do as long as tyrants ruled him and made use of the names of religion and the state to hold him in slavery. To Shelley's thinking, the tyrants who held men's minds in slavery were the priests, the lawyers, the politicians, and the rich, who

were the pillars of society and upheld the government of England in the early nineteenth century. By these, Shelley was condemned as an atheist and a renegade, but he clung to his belief and to his vision of man freed from the fetters of tyranny—

“ Equal, unclassed, tribeless and nationless,
Exempt from awe, worship, degree, the king
Over himself : just, gentle and wise.”

This was the vision that inspired much of his poetry. In *Prometheus Unbound*—a drama—Prometheus, helper of mankind, is bound in torture by Jupiter, the tyrant of the world—

“ whose altars men have served through fear,
Flattering the thing they feared, which fear was
hate.”

Through the suffering of Prometheus and the strength it inspired, Jupiter is overthrown, and mankind is once more free to grow to its full height.

That suffering must be the fate of those who try to help humanity was very clear to Shelley, as you will see if you read *The Revolt of Islam*, or the last three verses of *Prometheus Unbound*, which contain Shelley's confession of faith.

Shelley lived in the luminous world of his own imagination, visited there by ideas and feelings which were more real to him than flesh and blood. You will notice, as you read Shelley's poetry, how often he speaks of thoughts and feelings as though they were living creatures.

Thus, in his beautiful lament for the dead poet in

Adonais, he speaks of those who came to mourn at the bier—

“And others came . . . Desires and Adorations,
Winged Persuasions and veiled Destinies.
Splendours and Glories and glimmering Incarnations
Of hopes and fears and twilight fantasies
And Sorrow.”

Such were the images that moved through Shelley's imagination, and in the song of the Fourth Spirit in *Prometheus Unbound* (Act I) he tells us that the poet can create from the images that haunt his thoughts—

“Forms more real than living man,
Nurselings of Immortality.”

And this is, indeed, what Shelley has done.

Shelley loved the ancient Greeks exceedingly, and, like them, he believed that the soul is nourished by beautiful things, and that as she watches them and feels their loveliness, their beauty passes into her and makes her beautiful. Thus all beautiful things are also good, and the poet who wishes to enlarge the soul must offer beautiful images for her to brood over. In his prose, *Defence of Poetry*, Shelley makes clear his belief, and the whole of his poetry is a witness to it.

Yet he deals with terrible themes, and in his poetry there are many pictures of ruin and desolation, for Shelley believed, as the Greeks had believed before him, that it was a good thing to excite in the minds of those who read tragic poems, or saw tragedies played at the theatre, feelings of pity for the sufferings of men and women, and awe at the lot that Fate had held in store for them.

I have said nothing about the beauty of Shelley's songs and shorter poems. You will hear for yourself their exquisite music, and find pleasure in the living light and colour that shines in them. Indeed, so arresting is the music of Shelley's poetry, that people



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have not always realized how serious it is in purpose, and how much it is a part of Shelley's deep belief in man and beauty. It is true that his vision of a better world unfitted him to live in the world of his own time. The unhappy story of his life shows this most clearly. But his vision was his inspiration, and gave to

his poetry that note of rapture which carries us willingly away.

“He is a portion of the loveliness
Which once he made more lovely.”

With these words Shelley honoured his fellow poet, Keats, the youngest of the romantic poets and the first to die.

Keats, who had early determined to become a great poet, found many difficulties in his way. Shelley and the other romantic poets had been taught Greek and Latin, as a matter of course, at school and at their university. The literature of the classics was an open book to them, and there they could find great thoughts and noble utterances. Moreover, the study of Greek and Latin literature is, in itself, a splendid training for the mind, and it cultivates the critical taste of the student, who is made familiar with the clear dignity and high-bred restraint of the classics, and will not easily tolerate slipshod, tawdry or feeble writing.

But Keats had to discover for himself, by painful efforts and mistakes, what the others had inherited. He, like them, had the poet's nature, was sensitive, and had divine energy; but he had not, when he began to write poetry, the sure and trained taste which is one of the gifts of the classics to their students.

But if the classics were closed against Keats, English literature lay open before him and he entered its realms with delight. He detested the poetry of Pope. Spenser was entirely to his taste and he wrote to his friend, Cowden Clarke, telling him that he had romped through *The Faerie Queene* like a colt in a spring meadow. He wrote verses in Spenser's manner, and for some time old-fashioned words and phrases which he found in Spenser's poetry frequently appear in his own. He loved, too, the tales of the Greek gods and goddesses, and all that he could find out about the ancient world in which they reigned was a source of inspiration to him. In his first long poem, *Endymion* (1818), he chose as his theme the old Greek story of the love of the moon for a mortal. He was

himself very dissatisfied with his own poem, for in the preface he speaks of it "as a feverish attempt." He was aware of some, if not all, of its faults. He knew that he could not yet express with force and beauty the images that thronged his mind; he knew that he was young, that his aim was uncertain and his imagination



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tion fevered, and he knew that he would grow out of his uncertainty into matured power. But the dreaded reviewers fell upon *Endymion*. Blind and deaf to its beauties, they seized on its faults and attacked the young poet with merciless scorn. Anyone less robust than Keats or less absorbed in his determination to become a great poet, might have been

silenced by such criticism; but Keats pursued his study. He turned to Milton, and from him he learnt restraint and grandeur. In *Hyperion* the influence of Milton is clearly seen, but beautiful though *Hyperion* is, Keats became dissatisfied with his work. In Shakespeare he found all that he desired, and he is of all our English poets nearest to Shakespeare in the power to stir our imagination by a single word or a phrase. We speak very truly of the richness of

Keats's language—and by richness we do not mean the piling up of gorgeous adjectives till the poetry is like tapestry, stiffened with gold embroidery. By richness we mean that quality by which a single word, supremely well chosen, can call up in our imagination a train of thoughts or feelings.

Consider the force of some of the words in a few quotations from Keats—

“ My sleep has been *embroidered* with dim dreams,”

“ She stood in tears amid the *alien* corn,”

“ Nor what soft *incense* hangs upon the boughs,”

“ What *leaf-fringed* legend *haunts* about thy shape,”

“ I saw their *starved* lips in the gloom,
With horrid warning *gaped* wide.”

“ To that *large* utterance of the early gods.”

This power over language, which Keats had in some measure from the very first, became surer and stronger as his vision grew clearer and his understanding of life deeper. The work of the last few years of his short life is a perpetual joy to those who care for beauty. The five great odes and many of the sonnets have a richness of mood and language, which few other poets have reached.

In *The Eve of St. Agnes*, Keats tells us a legend of the Middle Ages, calling up picture after picture, mood after mood, with rich, vivid words. You will see at once, as you read *The Eve of St. Agnes*, why Keats is called the painter's poet, and why so many painters

have been tempted to find out whether they, with colours and canvas, could call up a clearer vision than Keats has done by his words and music. It would be difficult, I think, to find any picture which would make you feel the chill silence of a winter night more vividly than the first two verses of *The Eve of St. Agnes*. When you have read this poem, read again *Christabel* and *The Lay of the Last Minstrel*, and you will realize how strongly the Middle Ages appealed to the romantic poets and how differently. *Isabella, or The Pot of Basil* is a story of Italy, and *Lamia* a story of ancient Greece which Keats found in a Jacobean writer. He tried his hand at satire and drama and wrote a number of shorter poems, of which the most famous is *La Belle Dame sans Merci*.

In one of his sonnets, "When I have fears that I may cease to be," Keats speaks of his forboding that death may come to him before he has had time to give utterance to the poetry that is in him. His fear was justified. Before he was twenty-five it became clear that he could not live much longer. He was taken by his friend to Italy, and died in Rome in the spring of 1821.

Round this group of great poets, there were many lesser ones, but the solitary figure of Walter Savage Landor is the greatest. He was the friend of romantic poets, but his poetry was not charged with the colour and passion of romance. It has the clear, lucid tone and grave restraint which does not mark romantic poetry. Southey, Leigh Hunt, Thomas Moore, and Thomas Campbell were poets of great repute in their own day, and we still take pleasure in much that they wrote. And there were many others, who felt

the influence of the great romantics whose poetry, at first decried, lived down all criticism, and became the joy and inspiration of the next generation of poets.

We must now take up the story of prose during the nineteenth century.



COSTUME OF 1840.

CHAPTER X.

THE NINETEENTH CENTURY.

WE have seen that the Middle Ages enjoyed their prose romances and that the Elizabethans had their tales—romances of Arcadia, or the adventures of rogues. In the seventeenth century Defoe gave fresh life to the art of story-telling, and in the eighteenth century the novel grew in power and popularity. And now, in the early nineteenth century, there came two novelists who carried on the story of the novel in two different ways. One of these novelists was Sir Walter Scott, whose tales are called historical novels—the other was Jane Austen, whose novels are sometimes called novels of domestic life, or the novel of manners, though neither name is quite suitable.

Neither Scott nor Miss Austen invented a new kind of novel. There had been historical novels and novels of domestic life in the eighteenth century ; but there had been no novels to equal the *Waverley Novels* or Miss Austen's *Pride and Prejudice*.

When Scott decided to leave poetry to Lord Byron, he had in his desk an unfinished novel. The hero was a young Scots gentleman, a follower of the Young Pretender. Scott finished his novel and published it (1814) without disclosing the author's name. This was the first of the *Waverley Novels* and it was immediately popular ; for in it Scott made the past live, as no other novelist before him had been able to do. It was a tale of stirring adventures—of the loyalty of the Scots clans to the unlucky house of Stuart, of the

march of their motley army to England and the defeat of their hopes ; and it was told in such a way that the actors in these bygone scenes moved before the reader's eye, vivid and life-like. To re-create the times, in which his actors played their parts, was an easy matter for Scott, whose memory was stored with the knowledge which he had collected from his wide reading.

He knew what ideas and opinions were working in men's minds in the ages he described. He knew what things really interested them and how they would talk about them. Thus he could make his characters living people—whether they were kings and queens, or generals and statesmen whose lives had been told by historians, or whether they were camp followers, beggars, soldiers of fortune, gipsies, peasants or farmers whom Scott had invented out of his head.

Perhaps the least life-like, and therefore the least interesting, of all Scott's characters are the young heroes and heroines whose love story forms the plot of the novels. The hero of one novel is very like the hero of any other, whether, like Quentin Durward, he protects his lady through fifteenth century France or, like Kenneth, follows the banner of Cœur-de-Lion in Palestine. The heroines—with a few exceptions (which you will find out for yourselves if you read *The Heart of Midlothian* and *Rob Roy*)—do not interest us very much. Scott was too chivalrous to make his heroines anything less than perfect. It is natural that we should grow tired of faultless heroines, and wish them less perfect and more amusing ; and so we turn with relief, from the beautiful heroine to the old gipsy Meg Merrilees, her black elf locks escaping from her red

turban, her dark eyes flashing as she stands against the blue sky, calling down Heaven's curse on the Laird of Ellangowan.

There are more than twenty *Waverley Novels*. Some of them are tales of private adventure—in some we find ourselves at the courts of kings. Sometimes we are in Scotland, sometimes in France, England, Palestine, or Switzerland. We can live again in the days of King John in England, and in another novel pass on to the age of Elizabeth, and take part in the feast given in her honour at Kenilworth by the proud Earl of Leicester. We can see again the tragic figure of Elizabeth's rival, Mary, Queen of Scots, and her devoted followers. In *The Fortunes of Nigel* we are in London, in the reign of the timid, crafty king who ruled England after Elizabeth.

In each novel we are more and more surprised at the number and variety of the characters, who crowd in upon the scene. When you have finished reading one of the novels, *Old Mortality*, for instance, close your eyes and try to arrange the characters in the story as though they were walking in a procession or pageant. You will be surprised at the length of your procession and at the variety of the people who take part in it. There will be soldiers, ploughmen, Presbyterian ministers, Whig lords, great ladies and their servants, and old women, each distinct from his neighbour in appearance and behaviour. You can arrange your procession according to rank, the Duke of Monmouth and Claverhouse walking at the head with Goose Gibbie to bring up the rear ; you can arrange it according as the characters are serious or amusing, with Cuddie Headrigg as the most humorous person and MacBriar

or Mucklewrath as the most serious ; or you can divide your characters into Whigs and Covenanters, and Henry Merton will waver between them ; or you can divide them into good and bad, and Balfour of Burley will appear as chief villain (Scott loved describing villains), and you will be puzzled where to place Graham of Claverhouse.

To turn from Scott to Jane Austen is like turning from a gallery of crowded canvases, to study a few exquisite drawings. Scott, who had a very generous nature, praised Miss Austen's work at the expense of his own. He could do the great "bow-wow" style very well himself, he once said, but he could not equal the delicate, life-like work of Miss Austen.

In Miss Austen's novels, we travel safely by coach or carriage from the southern counties to London, to Bath, or to the seaside, and once, indeed, we journey as far north as Derbyshire ; but for the most part we move in the drawing-room or garden of some country house, dance at the assembly hall with the officers of the nearest regiment, and are concerned with paying calls and arranging garden parties and private theatricals. This is a very different world from the world Scott shows us, but it is not less real than his. Miss Austen knows how to make the everyday affairs of a few county families as exciting as a tournament, or a duel. If you tried to make a procession out of the characters in *Pride and Prejudice* or *Emma* or *Mansfield Park*, you would have a much shorter and less varied one than any of Scott's novels would give you. There would be hardly any poor or homeless people, no daring villains nor blood-stained soldiers. There would be a number of young ladies in high-waisted gowns and

young gentlemen of property, one or two match-making mothers, good-natured or cynical fathers, and a very fair sprinkling of clergymen and spinsters.

It was among people such as these that Jane Austen lived out her own days, sharing their occupations and amusements, and at the same time watching them with penetrating eyes, that marked down their qualities, their peculiarities, their follies and affectations. Like Elizabeth Bennett, the heroine of *Pride and Prejudice*, Jane Austen had "a lively, playful disposition, which delighted in anything ridiculous."

Manners in the early nineteenth century were very different from those we know to-day. They were formal and ceremonious. Young ladies in the country did not play games or take an interest in politics. They were taught "accomplishments and deportment," and learnt to sing and play and draw a little, and to dance very gracefully. They did not show much interest in the affairs of the nation, or in the ideas that were taking possession of men's minds. But within the narrow circle of their interests, they were neither dull nor stupid. It would be hard to find in any society, in any age, a young woman with more high spirits, wit and good sense than Miss Austen herself, or than the heroine who is very like her, Elizabeth Bennett.

There is no doubt that she found life full of amusement. You cannot read *Pride and Prejudice* without being aware that the authoress herself is delighted with the solemn absurdity of Mr. Collins, and the foolishness of Mrs. Bennett. It is easy to see that she admired wit and humour and the qualities which make up good breeding. Anything excessive or extravagant amused her, and excessive sentiment or sentimentality seemed

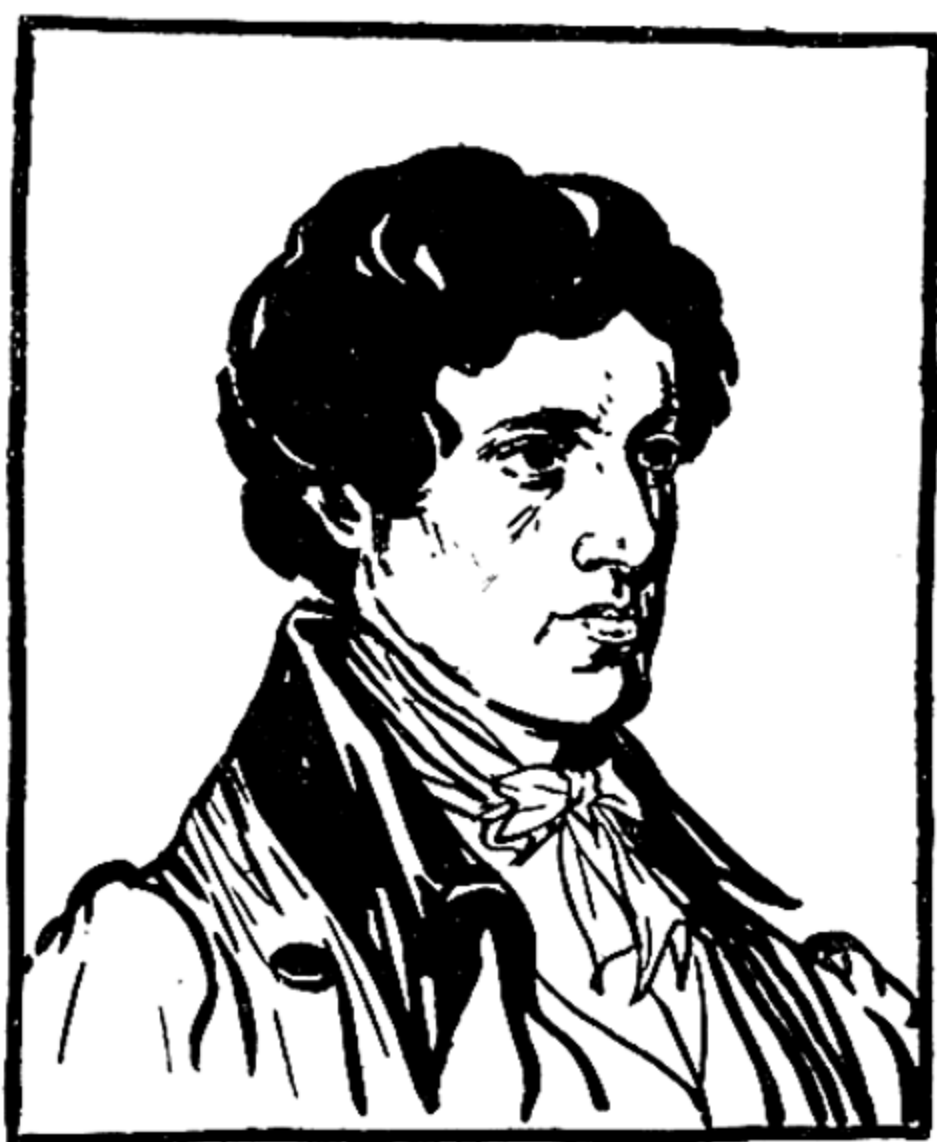
to her as foolish as extravagance in wealth or manners. It was her sense of humour, provoked by the silly, exaggerated heroines of fashionable novels, that first urged her to write. Her earliest sketches were written in copybooks for the amusement of herself and her family, and at the age of seventeen she produced a spirited burlesque or parody of the "fainting heroine," called *Love and Freindship*. In *Northanger Abbey* she laughs at the mysterious and romantic terrors endured by the heroines of another type of novel—the novel of terror—and in *Pride and Prejudice* (1813), which is her masterpiece, she takes leave of other novels, and enters into her own world, the world of *Emma*, *Mansfield Park*, *Sense and Sensibility* and *Persuasion*.

Within the limits of her own world, Jane Austen shows supreme skill in creating and handling her characters, in composing her scenes and arranging her plot. Her language gives full weight and point to the neatness of her wit and irony, and she is mistress of the difficult art of making conversations sound natural. Yet in her own time her greatness was recognized by very few, and while thousands praised the *Waverley Novels*, very few had even heard of Jane Austen's works. It was only after her death that their true value was discovered, and even now there are some readers who do not care for them, but those who admire Jane Austen place her first in the ranks of women novelists.

Of the many essayists who lived in the early nineteenth century, there is only space enough to mention two, Charles Lamb and William Hazlitt.

Charles Lamb is one of the best known and most lovable figures in literature. There are many accounts

of his life, but you can make your picture of him by reading his essays and letters, for Lamb likes to tell us about himself and his likes and dislikes, his books, his friends and relations, his holidays, his nightmares,



CHARLES LAMB.

and the daylight hag whom he hated—business. Read the *Essays of Elia* in this order and you will learn a great deal about the author and realize the charm of his humour: *The Old Benchers of the Inner Temple*, *Witches and Other Night Terrors*, *Christ's Hospital*, *My First Play*, *My Relations*, *Mackery End*, *The Superannuated Man*, *Old China*, and *Dream Children*.

For the tragic side of Lamb's life and the record of his patience and heroism, you must turn to the letters sent to his intimate friends in the times of his greatest stress.

The *Essays of Elia* were written when Lamb was middle-aged. He had tried other forms of writing and had read widely, especially the literature of Elizabethan and Jacobean writers. He was one of the earliest critics to praise the dramatists of Shakespeare's time, and to make a collection of favourite passages from them. You will notice, as you read the *Essays of Elia*, that Lamb uses many strange words, and often gives an old-fashioned turn to his sentences, and he does this, sometimes deliberately, sometimes unconsciously, so as to reproduce the style of seventeenth century prose which he delighted in reading.

The pleasure which older literature gave him did not spoil his pleasure in modern literature; he was quick to feel excellence wherever he met it. Lamb was one of the first to praise the *Lyrical Ballads*, singling out *The Ancient Mariner* and the *Tintern Abbey* lines for special praise. He was one of the very few to feel the power of Blake's poetry. The poem to the *Tiger*, he said was "glorious."

Lamb was Hazlitt's friend, almost the only one whom Hazlitt managed to keep, and they shared the same passion for literature. Stormy and quarrelsome in life, full of prejudices and suspicions, Hazlitt never lost his enthusiasm for the finest things in literature.

His lectures on *The English Poets* and on the *Age of Elizabeth* were greatly admired by Lamb, who was an excellent judge; and indeed it is difficult to read them without admiring them, and the earnest zeal of

the lecturer, as he points out the beauties of his subject, and his rapture when he praises his favourite authors. Hazlitt was generally a safer critic of bygone writers than of modern authors. When he dealt with the works of those men who were living in his own age, he was apt to be prejudiced against them, if he disliked their politics; and as Hazlitt was a fierce republican and an admirer of Napoleon, there were not many authors who did agree with him in politics. In *The Spirit of the Age*, a collection of essays, Hazlitt sums up the merits and the faults of some of the best known men of the age—Coleridge, Scott, Byron, Wordsworth, Southey, Leigh Hunt, Crabbe, Elia and others. This is an excellent book for those who would like to know more about the writers of this period, and what so famous a critic as Hazlitt thought of them. Hazlitt wrote another collection of essays called *Table Talk*, in which you will find *On Going a Journey*, a paper which shows Hazlitt at his happiest, and will give you some idea of the vigour and fluency of his style.

There is only time to mention the pleasant essays of Leigh Hunt, the friend of Keats, Shelley and Byron, and the much greater work of De Quincey, whose *Confessions of an Opium Eater* you may find mysterious and attractive.

You will have noticed, as the story of English literature has been unrolled before you, that each different form of literature, such as the drama, the essay, or the novel had to be first discovered and used and changed until it took on its final shape by which we know it to-day. So far we have been able to trace the way in which each form appeared and how it grew and changed, but when we come to the middle of the

nineteenth century we find that no new forms of literature are invented. We shall find growth and change within each separate kind of literature. We may find plays that are like novels and poems that sound like prose, but, although a new spirit is working, it uses the old forms.

In the early stages of our story, there were not many great makers of literature and not a great many different forms, and it was therefore an easy matter to tell the story of literature in the age of Chaucer and Langland. But as time goes on the story becomes



LEIGH HUNT.

more difficult. Not only are there far more writers, but there are far more great writers, and the ways of writing are more numerous. Merely to name those, who in the age of Victoria wrote books worthy to be called literature, would be a long task, and so it is only possible here to choose out a few for your consideration: Carlyle, Tennyson, Browning, Dickens, Thackeray, Mrs. Gaskell, George Eliot, and Charles Kingsley; and over at least two of these writers you

will have to exercise patience. You will probably not find it pleasant or profitable to read Carlyle's prose, before you are seventeen or eighteen years old. There is a great deal of Browning's poetry that you will never enjoy. But if you are to understand what literature meant in the Victorian Age, you must learn something about the work of these two writers, for they satisfied the needs of the men and women of their day and coloured their thinking.

Carlyle was born in Ecclefechan in 1795. His father, an uneducated man and a stonemason by trade, was possessed of remarkable force of character. Carlyle always spoke of his father as the most remarkable man he had ever met, and when his father died he wrote a sketch of him (published after Carlyle's death under the title of *Reminiscences*). In this sketch we see the early home of Carlyle, and his stern, frugal father saving out of his small means, so that his son should become an educated man. The remembrance of his early life, of the dignity of his father who worked with his hands, of his upright spirit and stern simplicity which would not stoop to flatter or be false, always remained with Carlyle, and became a standard by which he judged the true worth of other people.

Through his father's efforts Carlyle reached the University of Edinburgh, and here, though he thought little of his teachers, he studied deeply, mathematics and German literature. His health was always wretched, and he became irritable and unsettled in mind. He refused to become a minister and began to brood over life.

It seemed to him that the whole world had agreed to deceive themselves, to shut their eyes to the truth

and to worship false gods, such as money, rank, comfort, or political power. Sham beliefs and sham feelings had taken the place of sincerity, because people found it easier to follow the fashions of the day, than to work out their own beliefs for themselves. It seemed to him that people had forgotten that their souls were more important than their bodies, and that they held success and prosperity in this world to be the most important and desirable things in life.

Carlyle was, by nature, eager to denounce people, but he was aware that he must first find out for himself the meaning of life before he rebuked others for their want of understanding. It took him a very long time, to make clear to himself the meaning of life, and it was not until after he and his wife had exiled themselves for six years, in their lonely farm at Craigenputtock, that Carlyle was able to give his message to the world in *Sartor Resartus*. It is not surprising that the world did not understand Carlyle's message or gospel. Not only was the title strange (*The Tailor Re-tailored*) and the language difficult, but the author seemed to delight in perplexing and mystifying his readers by offering them ideas so fantastic, that it was hard to take them seriously. The plan of the book was bewildering, there was no plain straightforward statement of the author's views, but instead, a confused story of a strange old German philosopher, Professor of Things in General in the University of I-Don't-Know-Where. But to the patient reader who drove his way on in spite of difficulties, the message became clear, and he found himself listening to the gospel of Carlyle which ran thus: "The earth which seems so real to us is only the outward appearance of the spirit of the world,

and is like a garment clothing the spirit, just as the body of man clothes his soul or spirit. These clothes, the earth and the body, are only valuable because they contain the spirit. It is a mistake to value them for any other reason than that they protect the spirit. Mankind has made other arrangements to protect himself, such as the state, religion, education, war, but he must remember that if any of these injure the spirit of man, even if they protect his body, they are evil and must be rejected. The nation is not to consider itself happy because it is rich, a man is not a free spirit merely because he has a vote. Outward riches are not the sign of true progress. As for man, he is not to claim happiness as though it were his by right; he is not to expect to be happy. His only claim is to be allowed to do his duty and to work, and only those who work either with the hand, or with the head are worthy of honour."

This was not a new gospel, but Carlyle preached it in a way that was new and impressive. You will find it in all the books he wrote, from *The History of the French Revolution*, the book which made him famous, to *The Latter Day Pamphlets*; and you will find its fruits in the work of many of the greatest writers who followed Carlyle. It is clear to us, as we look back on the middle nineteenth century, that there was need of a Carlyle; for there had been a great increase of wealth in England amongst certain classes of the people, and there had not been an equal increase in wisdom. There was some danger that the nation might become absorbed in making money, and forget to care about more important things, and Carlyle's voice was constantly raised in protest against their

forgetfulness. Carlyle was a brilliant historian, and he found, in the history of his own and of other nations, strong proof of the truth of his gospel, so that even in the wonderfully vivid studies of *The French Revolution*, *Cromwell*, and *Frederick the Great*, we find Carlyle insisting on the need of a true understanding of life.

When Carlyle was an old man his home in Chelsea was constantly visited by pilgrims. They came from all countries of the world to listen to the words of the sage whose works they had read with deep admiration. All classes of the people read his works, and especially mechanics and workpeople; for Carlyle had always praised the labourer, and had held that honest toil was worthy of honour. Young men at Oxford and Cambridge studied his writings, and accepted his gospel. Many wise men of his own age were his friends, and among them was Lord Tennyson.

Tennyson, like Carlyle, was deeply concerned with the difficult questions which had arisen in his time, and which the nation had somehow or another to answer. There was the question of the poverty of the working class, of the dreadful places, both in town and in the country, in which they had to work and to live—of the misery and disease which came about through their poverty, and the thoughtlessness of their employers and landlords. There was the spirit of greediness and want of honesty in trade, the selfish way in which rich people spent their wealth, and great bitterness and ill-will between the different classes in the nation.

All the great writers of the Victorian age, with the exception, perhaps, of Browning, thought seriously

about these problems and wrote about them either in poetry or prose ; partly because they were very much in their thoughts, and partly because they wanted to make other people think about them, too. It is one of the marks of the Victorians, that they made use of their genius to make clearer to their readers the crying needs of their day.

But in Tennyson's early poems, you will not find that he deals with any serious questions. He is far too



LORD TENNYSON.

much occupied in making experiments in beautiful words, rhythms and word pictures. He had always taken great pleasure in these things, and both in his father's rectory in Lincolnshire, and at Cambridge with his friends, he had soaked his mind in poetry. Byron, Shelley, Keats, Wordsworth and Coleridge, Milton, Shakespeare, and many other English poets were his favourite reading, and he knew and admired the classics of Greece and Rome.

In one of his poems, *The Palace of Art*, Tennyson tells us the story of a human soul, who built for herself a lordly palace and lived there alone. She furnished her palace with rare treasures that the mind and hand of mankind had made, and shut herself up alone to enjoy her possessions. For three years she lived there, well pleased with her proud solitude, and then, in the fourth year, she fell—

“ Like Herod when the shout was in his ears
Struck thro' with pangs of hell.”

The palace and its treasures filled her with loathing, and she hated the loneliness she had made by shutting out all human faces. Despair seized her until at last, throwing aside her royal robes, she left her palace to live with humble people, with whom she might some day return to her palace. By his story Tennyson wishes us to understand that no true artist may shut himself up in his own private kingdom of art, and refuse to trouble himself about the needs or sufferings of his fellow creatures. Tennyson held firmly to this belief and you will see, if you compare his earliest poems with those which came later, how his work grew more serious in purpose.

In *Locksley Hall*, *Maud*, *In Memoriam*, and many other poems, Tennyson is deeply concerned with the problems of his own day, and even in *The Idylls of the King*, which tell of the times of King Arthur of the Round Table, Tennyson is at pains to draw from the fate of King Arthur, a lesson for the nineteenth century to learn. Tennyson was a patriot and anxious that England should not lose her good name among other nations. He was a lover of England, of her laws and institutions as well as the natural beauty of her landscapes. He was sure that her way of ruling was the best in Europe, and he had little sympathy with other countries, where the people did not trust their rulers and tried to change them.

Tennyson has often been blamed for not taking wider views, and for allowing his views to be too much coloured by the beliefs of the Victorian age; and, indeed, it is true that if his poetry were less musical we might grow tired of his message, and there are many people who prefer poems like *Ænone* or the *Lotos*

Eaters, where Tennyson has forgotten the nineteenth century, to those where he remembers it.

But there can be no doubt as to the music of his verse. Few English poets have had a more sensitive ear, or a clearer sense of the harmonies that language can be made to yield, and no one has taken more trouble than Tennyson has to bring his poetry to perfection. He was not satisfied with any poem, till he had made sure that it was as musical as he could make it. The manuscripts of his poems show how frequently he altered and refashioned his work before he thought it worthy to be published.

Try over for yourself the opening lines of *Ænone*, or the passage in *The Passing of Arthur*, which opens—

“ So all day long the noise of battle roll’d,”

lingering over the vowels so as to give them their full value, and you will realize something of the quality of Tennyson’s blank verse. He used many other metres, proving in each, his power of making harmonies. Sometimes, as in the lyrics in the *Princess* or in *Break, break, break*, the music is sad and haunting, sometimes, as in *The Revenge*, it is like the swift, steady beat of some great-winged bird.

Making musical verse did not satisfy Tennyson. He wanted to stir the imagination of his hearers. Like all poets, things that were beautiful in shape and colour, sound or scent, made so vivid an impression on him that he was able to describe them in words which made other people feel their beauty. He was also able to call up in his own imagination, visions or images of beauty and, translating them into words, send them

to call up like images in other people's minds. Tennyson can call up an image in a few words—

“The stern black-bearded Kings with wolvish eyes.”

“A cry that shiver'd to the tingling stars.”

Sometimes he draws with words a careful and elaborate picture, and sometimes he gives perfect utterance to feelings which all have felt, though few could voice them as he does—

“And the stately ships go on

To their haven under the hill ;

But O for the touch of a vanish'd hand,

And the sound of a voice that is still ! ”

Tennyson had a long and outwardly uneventful life. He was for years Poet Laureate of England, and he remained a great poet to the end of his life. He turned many themes into poetry, and wrote poetic plays for the stage. A few critics disturbed his peace of mind—for he dreaded criticism—but he was almost universally admired, and his poetry found its way into thousands of homes.

The admirers of Browning's poetry were, in comparison, a very small band. Tennyson's poetry had seemed, with a few exceptions, easy to understand and musical to read, but Browning, it was felt, chose out-of-the-way subjects, treated them so as to increase the difficulty of understanding them, and did not mind assaulting the ears with harsh sounds. There is a good deal of truth in this criticism, especially when it is applied to the longer poems like *Sordello* ; but it does not apply to the best of Browning's poetry. It is true that Browning's mind moved swiftly, and

leapt from idea to idea like an antelope, bounding over rocks and leaving its pursuers panting behind it. At first, we cannot find the connection between his ideas, and are tempted to think that there is none; but further thought will discover the connection and we begin to follow more quickly, and at last to keep up with the pace of the poet. This is a very good exercise for the mind, and it is much more exhilarating to jump from rock to rock with Browning than to walk along smoothly with some easier author. It is best to begin with the simpler poems of which you will find a list at the end of this chapter.

Browning was a man of wide and curious reading, in several languages. Many years of his life were spent in Italy, and he was familiar with the hopes of the Italian people in the nineteenth century, and with the works of their great men in the past. He was a student of history, and possessed an amazing knowledge of the life of men and women in other days, and his knowledge was not confined to English history, but included that of other nations.

In all countries, and in all ages, he found subjects that inspired him. A Renaissance painter, an Arab physician in the time of Christ, a modern Italian patriot, a poisoner in eighteenth-century France—he could make all of these figures, and many more besides, live and speak as they might have done in their own lifetime. Browning's favourite method of creating his characters is not by describing them, or their thoughts and feelings. He makes us overhear his characters as they talk to themselves, or to their own friends, and reveal their secret desires and ambitions. We must gather from their own utterances what

manner of people they are, and Browning treats us as a dramatist treats his audience, except that he offers us one character (or poem) at a time for our consideration. This is a difficult method of presenting character, but Browning is a brilliant master of his method. He had vigour, dramatic suddenness, humour, wit and insight. He could make a character reveal, by an unguarded word or two, motives he was trying to hide in a flow of fine language ; but we must be alert to pick up our clues, or else we miss the subtlety of the character study. Browning was deeply interested in the motives that make men and women act as they do. He gives us many a vivid flash of description by which we can see the outward looks of men, but he is far more concerned to draw the picture of their souls, and the struggle of the motives from which their actions spring. Browning was not afraid to explore the workings of evil and villainous souls. He has left us many studies of vice, but he had himself, an unconquerable faith in the power of goodness. He did not share the doubts of the middle of the nineteenth century, when many men believed that new discoveries in Science had made belief in the faith of Christianity impossible. Browning *felt* sure of God and goodness, and no argument could shake him.

If you wish to be convinced that Browning's poetry is musical, you must neglect great masses of his writing and fix your attention on lyrics such as *Love Among the Ruins*, and on some passages of blank verse poems. You will discover that he handles many metres, and especially rapid ones, with great ease, and has a gift of producing unusual and often amusing rhyme, though this is a matter of wit rather than of music.

He has an amazingly full and fluent vocabulary, and has words to describe prosaic things, and words for moments of rare feeling.

Browning's life was devoted to poetry, and he never ceased to practise his art. He had married a poetess—



ELIZABETH BARRETT BROWNING.

Elizabeth Barrett Browning—and they worked together in Italy. There were many poets in the reign of Victoria who took their inspiration very seriously, and wrote much poetry, and there were a great many people who read their works—for a great reading public had grown up anxious to be supplied with good poetry and good fiction.

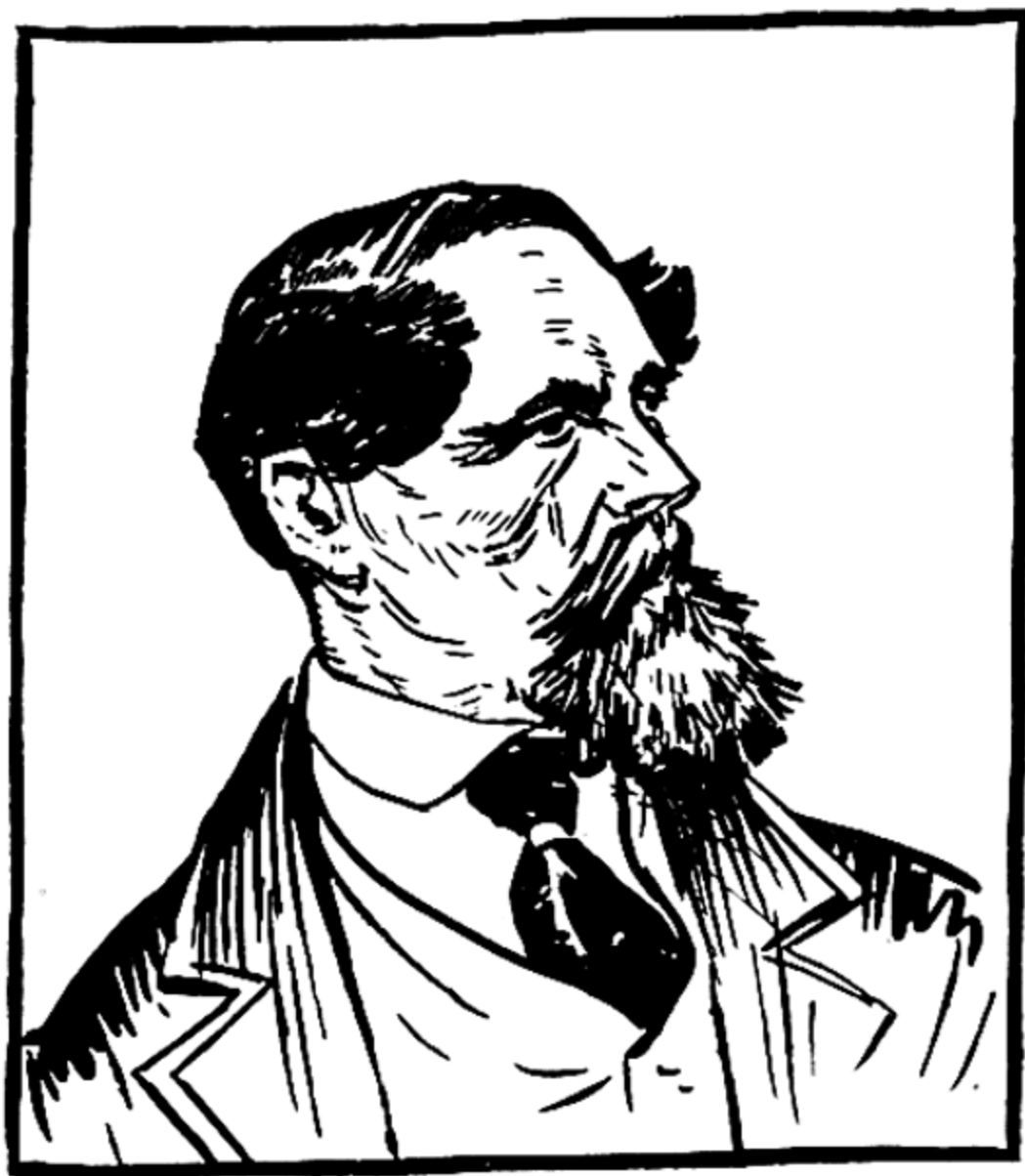
The most popular novelist of the Victorian age was

Charles Dickens. The monthly arrival of the magazine, in which his work appeared, was an event of the utmost importance. The old ladies of Cranford might find *Pickwick Papers* vulgar, and learned critics might wish that the author had enjoyed the advantages of a classical education, but the public at large asked for nothing better than *Nicholas Nickleby*, *The Old Curiosity Shop*, and the books which followed them in rapid succession.

Dickens enjoyed very few advantages in his boyhood. He was very early acquainted with poverty, debt, and hard times. The darkest experiences of David Copperfield, in his London bottle-washing warehouse, were drawn from Dickens's own life as a boy, and Dickens could never forget the distress he suffered at that time, and his injured pride, as he saw all hope of becoming a distinguished man slipping from him. But his early life on the London streets taught him many things that were to make him famous. It made him quick-witted and observant, and a shrewd judge of character. It showed him sides of life, and kinds of people, that he could never have known in any other way. It taught him how poor people lived and what they thought of life. These things he could not have learnt so well elsewhere, and they were more valuable to him than schooling.

As Dickens grew up his circumstances improved. He studied to become a lawyer and taught himself shorthand, so that he could earn money by reporting notable speeches. This work took him to many different parts of England, and, as he had to travel by road, he came to know the coaching roads and inns and the people who used them.

His great ambition was to write. He studied the novels of Fielding and Smollett, and learned something of their art. His first attempts were sketches of scenes and characters and short tales, and his first



CHARLES DICKENS.

novel was *Pickwick Papers*. There is very little plot in *Pickwick Papers*—it is the story of Mr. Pickwick's journeys from London to Ipswich, or Bath, or Dingley Dell, what happened to him and his followers at these places, and the people whom they met. It was exactly the kind of plot to show Dickens at his best. There was room in it for all that he had been learning about

life—for all the different types of people he had met—for the London streets, country inns, country towns, fashionable assembly rooms, and debtors' prisons. Characters crowd in upon these scenes, jovial, pathetic, benevolent, or sly, and whether we keep Christmas with Mr. Pickwick at Dingley Dell, or attend Sam Weller's "swarry" with the footmen of Bath, we are in a world where high spirits and laughter reign.

Dickens published novel after novel. He found inventing scenes and characters an exciting and delightful affair, and we can still feel, as we read his pages, the zest with which he wrote them. His imagination worked so rapidly that his pen could hardly keep pace with it, and often it was hard for him to keep within the limits he had marked out for his story. The characters he created became so real to him that he was absorbed in them, and shared their happiness when they were fortunate, and their misery when they were unfortunate. Dickens was quick to see the amusing side of life, and equally quick to feel pity and indignation at the sight of needless suffering. He was justly angry at the abuses which he saw around him—at the cruel treatment of school children, at the miserable prisons where debtors used to live, at the heart-breaking delays of the law courts, where men grew old and bitter, waiting for their cases to be decided. In *Nicholas Nickleby*, *Little Dorrit*, and *Bleak House*, he described the victims of these abuses in terms which made all men realize their sufferings, and in many of his novels he did other services to humanity. But he passes readily from anger to laughter, and we have no sooner pitied the wretched children at Mr. Squeers's school in Yorkshire, than we are laughing at

Miss Fanny Squeers and John Brodie and their evening party.

Dickens believed that there were villains and rascals in the world, and he has a fairly large picture gallery of such folk illustrating all shades of villainy, from Uriah Heep's crawling humility to Bill Sykes's savagery. He believed that there were a great many useless people, some of them pretending to be busy, and others frankly idle, and most of them 'people of rank and fashion. Nevertheless, he was sure that the greater number of men and women were good people, and that some of them were heroic in goodness. His favourite characters are overflowing with benevolence. Their greatest happiness is, like that of the Vicar of Wakefield, to see happy faces around them. Dickens himself, in the last chapter of each of his novels, is like Father Christmas delightedly bestowing happiness on all those characters who have played a creditable part in his story.

Dickens had a great admiration for those who could keep "jolly" when they had every reason to feel miserable. In the world he describes in his novels, there are more poor people than rich ones. For the outcasts like Jo, the crossing-sweeper, Dickens has infinite pity, and no one has described more terrible scenes of poverty and vice; but no one knew better than Dickens that hard luck and low spirits do not always go hand in hand, and there is more laughter than gloom among his characters. Mrs. Todger has to work hard to keep her lodgers good-tempered and make her lodging-house pay, but she has enough spirits left to give a party for Mr. Pecksniff and his daughters. Mr. Crummles's actors and actresses play

to empty houses in the provinces, but they are always expecting a London engagement, and Mr. Micawber, frequently plunged in despair, is always hoping for something to turn up.

Dickens could describe ordinary people and their doings so as to make them seem full of interest and amusement. Mr. Weller shaking carpets with the pretty housemaid, Ruth Pinch buying steak at the butcher, Sairey Gamp entertaining Betsy Prig, are not in themselves imposing people, but Dickens has made them immortal.

He was also able to imagine extraordinary people with remarkable habits and the oddest appearance—characters who may seem to us too exaggerated to be believed in. We do not feel we could ever meet such people, however much we might like to do so, and sometimes we find it hard to believe that they could have spoken and acted, as Dickens makes them do.

Dickens found material for his novels lying around him wherever he went. As he grew more and more famous, he travelled in Europe and in America, and in his novels there are scenes drawn from these places. But his favourite scene was London. He knew not only the fashionable streets but the queer out-of-the-way places, and the life that went on there. The river had a special charm for him, and he left many descriptions of it, none better than that in the last chapters of *Great Expectations*. There are few of his characters who do not find their way, sooner or later, to London; even in the two historical novels—*Barnaby Rudge* and *A Tale of Two Cities*—London still holds her place.

With the exception of these two novels Dickens

wrote of the life of his own times. In *David Copperfield* (1850) he told the story of his own youth, and in a dozen other novels, he drew the world of Victorian days and men and women as they seemed to him. He died with his last novel unfinished (1870), but not before he had given a new source of pleasure to his own age and to those which have followed his.

Dickens became popular as soon as he published *Pickwick Papers*, but Thackeray had been writing for ten years before his power was recognized—and it was not until *Vanity Fair* was published that he was widely known. Yet he had had all the early advantages that Dickens had missed. He went to a famous school and from there he passed on to Cambridge. He travelled abroad, and learnt to speak and read other languages, and to paint. He moved easily in the society of painters, men of letters, and more fashionable people, but his early writings, sketches, and stories were not very much noticed, nor was *Vanity Fair* received at first with anything like the praise that *Pickwick Papers* had gained. It is easy to guess the reason.

When Dickens felt indignant he said so in his novels, whole-heartedly. He made it quite clear that he hated his bad characters and loved his good ones, and he was apt to exaggerate their vices or their virtues. But Thackeray tantalized his readers. They did not know whether they were to admire Amelia Sedley, or to think her silly and selfish. They were not sure that it was right for Becky Sharp to be so amusing and so heartless. They thought that their author was mocking when he made good people silly, and bad people charming; and when he compared the world to the *Vanity Fair* that Bunyan's pilgrims had seen in

their Progress, they felt that he thought ill of humanity, and jested at their expense.

It is true that Thackeray's selfish characters are more amusing than his unselfish ones. His heroines have more faults than Dickens's, and his villains are not so villainous. It is true that he was a satirist and made his characters display their foolishness. He did not think the society of his day either wise or kind, and when he described it in his novels, he did not attempt to make it appear better than it was. He believed that many people acted from mean motives, that they had done so in past times and would do so in the future. He thought that many things that men and women strove for were not worth their strife. Views such as these are not cynical; they are serious.

In *Vanity Fair*, Thackeray mounts his pulpit and announces his text—the vanity of all things. Then he descends from the pulpit and leaves his characters to act out their parts. They give a brilliant performance. Thackeray speaks of his characters as “puppets,” but they are living creatures, though there is no hero and a strange heroine. The scenes are laid in England and Belgium, in the years before and after Waterloo. The plot follows the fortunes of Becky Sharp from her humble rôle in the academy of the Miss Pinkerton's, through her conquest of London society, to her downfall and retreat to the continent. *Vanity Fair* is one of the greatest studies of life in our language; it has a spaciousness which few other novels can claim.

Pendennis and *The Newcomes* reflect the London world that Thackeray moved in. *Pendennis* tells us

something of Thackeray's own experiences at his university, and among journalists and editors, and *The Newcomes*, in which Pendennis reappears, shows us the Bohemian London of the young art students, and life in more fashionable circles. In each of these novels Thackeray preaches his sermon—the vanity of the things we worship—and in each he gives us a brilliant picture of the men and women who were called on to worship them, and how far they obeyed.

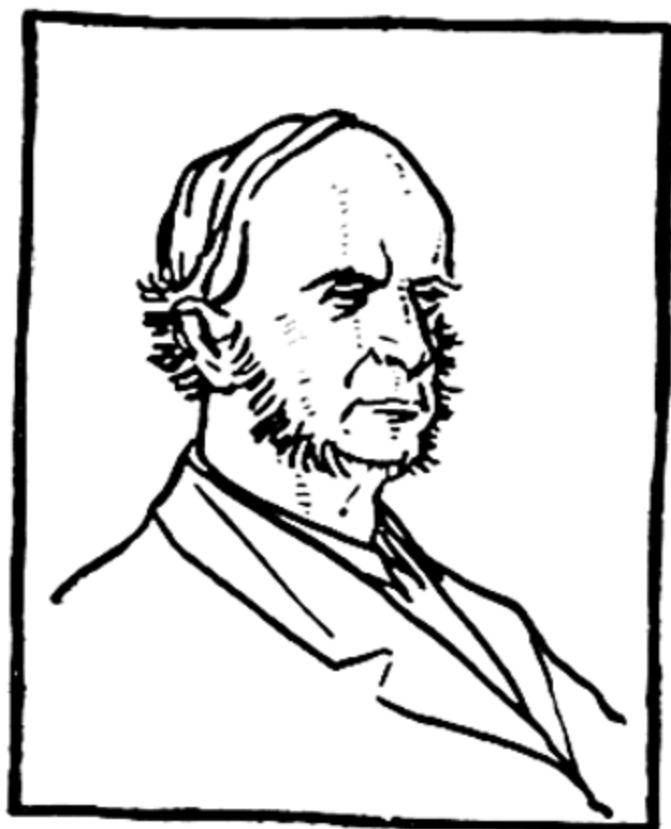
Esmond is a story of the time of Queen Anne—Colonel Esmond is one of Thackeray's great gentlemen—and it is he who tells the story of the fortunes of his house. He has to speak, therefore, in the fashion of the gentleman of Queen Anne's time, and Thackeray has caught the speech and manners of the days of the *Spectator* to perfection. Among Colonel Esmond's friends were Steele and Addison, Marlborough commanded him in the French wars, Beatrix Esmond, his half-sister, was lady-in-waiting to Queen Anne and a supporter of the son of James II, and all these people appear in the pages of *Esmond* more life-like than in history.

Thackeray wrote other novels and essays and lectures. His papers on *Snobs* appeared in *Punch*, and when he was editor of the *Cornhill Magazine* he wrote *The Roundabout Papers*, and an account of *The Four Georges*. In all these papers there is humour, brilliant description, and deep knowledge of human nature.

These two writers—Dickens and Thackeray—were held to be the greatest of the Victorian novelists, but there were others not less gifted in some respects, but not in all. Charles Kingsley, inspired by the teachings of Carlyle, wrote two novels, in which he revealed the

conditions of the poor in town and country, *Alton Locke* and *Yeast*. Another of his novels, *Westward Ho!*, is famous as one of the first tales of the Elizabethan seamen. Disraeli, besides a number of novels in which the chief interest is politics and young statesmen, described in *Sybil* the awful conditions of life in mining districts. Mrs. Gaskell, a writer of interest, is best remembered by *Cranford* and *Mary Barton*.

Mary Barton is a tale of the life of Manchester factory hands, in the hard years when corn was dear, and hungry men became desperate. Mrs. Gaskell, who lived in Manchester and saw the distress growing steadily worse, put aside the novel she was writing about Yorkshire. She was moved by sympathy for the care-worn men who struggled on, and who were too ignorant and untaught to state their grievances eloquently. She was anxious, she said, "to give some utterance to the agony which, from time to time, convulses this dumb people." Her utterance, *Mary Barton*, drew sympathy from all thinking people.



CHARLES KINGSLEY.

It is clear that the Victorian novelists placed their pens at the service of humanity—that they felt it part of their mission to devote their best work to

awaken sympathy for suffering. They had a sense of responsibility and a seriousness of purpose in their art. The novel, they felt, was an instrument for good and must be so used.

We see this seriousness very clearly in the novels of George Eliot, a distinguished woman who had studied and written long before she became a novelist. It was her aim to show the beauty of commonplace people, and the value of everyday happenings. The novel was not to be the record of splendid people, rich, important, and impressive—it was to find room for “those old women scraping carrots with their work-worn hands, those heavy clowns taking holiday in a dingy pot-house, those rounded backs and stupid weather-beaten faces that have bent over the spade and done the rough work of the world—those homes with their tin pans, their brown pitchers, their rough curs, and their clusters of onions.” This passage is taken from *Adam Bede* and might serve in part as a motto for that novel, and for *The Scenes from Clerical Life*, and *The Mill on the Floss*, though George Eliot loses sight of it in her later work.

Not all Victorians wrote their novels with the purpose of making the world a better place for others; except in so far as any excellent work of art makes the world better and richer. Anthony Trollope wrote many scenes from clerical life, though he did not call them by that name. He placidly accepted things as they were in our clerical world and made them extraordinarily amusing. Emily Brontë, whose story *Wuthering Heights* has a power and intensity beyond all praise, had no other purpose in writing than to satisfy her need to find expression; and Charlotte,

her sister, though she flamed in anger against insincerity or oppression, did not set herself to fight abuses in her novels. In *Jane Eyre*, *Shirley* and *Villette*, each of them a masterpiece, our interest is absorbed by the emotions of each character and their relations with each other, and not with the world at large. The world which Charlotte Brontë draws is a small one—a Yorkshire village—a boarding school in Belgium—the few households visited by a governess—but it is neither a quiet nor dull world. The passionate imagination of its creator makes it intensely alive.

We must pass by many interesting prose writers, mentioning only Macaulay, whose essays are full of interest, Kinglake whose travel book *Eothen* should be read by all, Borrow the lover of gipsy life, till we come to Ruskin, whose ideas form a good starting-point for the next chapter.

List of Browning's simpler poems—

How they Brought the Good News.

The Pied Piper of Hamelin.

Home Thoughts from Abroad.

The Guardian Angel.

Up at a Villa—Down in the City.

Love Among the Ruins.

Soliloquy of the Spanish Cloister.

Fra Lippo Lippi.

Pompilia's speech in The Ring and the Book.

CHAPTER XI.

THE NINETEENTH CENTURY

(continued).

WHEN you look at the row of eleven volumes—the collected edition of Ruskin's works—you may well be puzzled to know what there is of interest there for you and how to find it. If you like to read about other countries, take down the volumes that contain *The Stones of Venice* and *Mornings in Florence*. You will see as you read a few pages and look at the pictures, that the things which interested Ruskin most were works of art such as buildings, pictures, and statues, and the beauty of landscape. Ruskin, who had great feeling for beautiful things, had also studied the history of architecture and painting, and the history of the nations who had produced the most famous artists. When he turned his eyes from gazing at the lovely things, that had been made by other races, in other days, to the things that were made in England in the Victorian age he was distressed beyond measure by their ugliness.

It was Ruskin's belief that you could read the characters of men and of nations in the kind of art they produced, and that a foolish or vicious people could not make great art any more than greedy or insensitive people could. It followed, then, that people who made ugly things, or allowed other people to make them, were wanting in some good quality, and Ruskin argued that the ugliness of the manufacturing towns that had sprung up in England, and the ugliness

of the articles they produced was a sign of stupidity and greed.

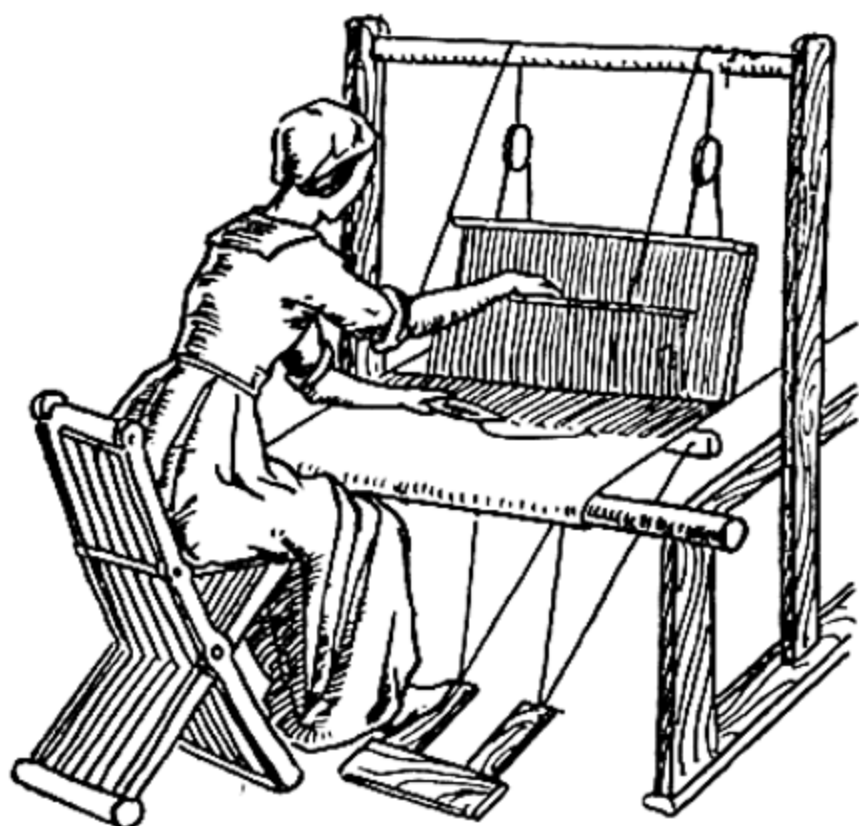
When people told him that the great increase of manufactured goods meant a great increase of wealth for England, he refused to believe them. Wealth to him did not mean money. "The richest country," he once said, "is that which nourishes the greatest number of noble and happy human beings." He did not think it possible for factory "hands" to take any pleasure in the things their machines turned out, hundreds at a time, and all exactly alike. Work in which it was impossible to take pleasure was as bad as slavery. Ruskin could understand that the craftsman in the Middle Ages, who put his whole soul and devotion into the stone flowers he was carving in some great cathedral, would be happy in his work—that he could feel pleasure in shaping his flowers by the skill of his own hands and after his own desire. But the nineteenth century worker who was not allowed to have any say in the designing of his work, and perhaps never handled more than one part of it, could not be expected to find any pleasure in helping to turn out cast iron railings.



JOHN RUSKIN.

Ruskin would willingly have swept away many of the factories where men made, by machinery, the things

they had once made by hand. Furniture, pottery, fabrics, into which men had once put their thoughts and the work of their hands were being made by machines, and had no meaning in them. It was too late on the tide for Ruskin to do away with machines, but he taught people to see that the thing which is



OLD HAND LOOM.

planned with relish, and shaped by hands that have taken pleasure in their toil, has a beauty that the most elaborate machine-made work cannot equal.

It was not an easy lesson for people to learn, but Ruskin never ceased to teach it. You will find it everywhere in his writings (for he repeated it many times over), and especially in *The Queen of the Air*. By degrees, some people learnt his lesson. They realized the ugliness that surrounded them and tried to replace it by better things. Poets and painters drew inspiration from Ruskin's teaching and helped

his cause ; and workmen listened to his message, as they had listened to the gospel of Carlyle, and found some things in common.

Ruskin was a master of eloquence. His descriptions of art and nature are full of rich sound and colour. He was a lover of language, and if you read *Sesame and Lilies* you will see with what care he studied the words of poets.

Among those poets who felt the truth of Ruskin's teaching was William Morris, and among painters, Burne-Jones. These two, who were lifelong friends, knew each other first as undergraduates at Oxford, and shared the same taste in reading. Their favourite modern authors were Carlyle and Ruskin in prose, Keats, Tennyson and Browning in poetry. It was natural that students of Carlyle and Ruskin should not think highly of the nineteenth century ; it was natural that they should turn from the Present to the Past. Morris had spent much of his youth in Essex, where there are churches in which the art of the Middle Ages still lives. He had always felt that the Middle Ages held for him a special charm. At Oxford he devoted his time to reading all that could make him more familiar with his favourite period, and during his holidays, he visited the churches of France which had been built by mediæval hands. Chaucer, Froissart, the chronicler of the Hundred Years War, and Malory stirred his imagination, and he could think himself back into the days they wrote of and see what they saw.

His first book of poems, *The Defence of Guinevere and other Poems*, shows where Morris found his inspiration. Guinevere, Lancelot, and Galahad are taken

from the world of Malory ; the knights, whose feats he tells of, might have stepped out of the pages of Froissart. You will notice two things in these early poems, the startling force and directness of some of the poems and a strange simplicity of language. Compare *Shameful Death* with one of the old tragic ballads ; you will feel that, although there are some differences, there is in both the same stern simplicity. *The Haystack in the Floods* and *Riding Together*, though they are not like ballads, are strong and vivid, and move swiftly.

Some of the poems have the effect of dreams moving slowly with shadowy trailing figures and thin music, and then, all at once, there comes a sudden vivid phrase, like a searchlight, playing over a strip of land and throwing up clearly its smallest details. Neither dream nor detail belong to the modern world. They are, like the other poems, the work of an imagination which looked back across time, to the world of the Middle Ages and found it more delectable than ours.

It was nearly ten years before Morris published his next volume of poetry, *The Life and Death of Jason*. In these years he had found many interests. People who knew him as a boy used to notice the peculiar restlessness of his hands, which seemed always to be seeking some employment. When he grew up he found work for them. He learnt to weave, to make pottery tiles, stained glass, wallpapers, and furniture after his own designs and with his own hands. In this way, he and his firm of friends carried out the ideals of Ruskin, and fought the ugliness of which he had complained.

It is said that when Morris wished to furnish the house he had built for himself in Essex, he could not

find, in any of the London shops, well designed and shapely furniture, and so he had to make it himself. In this way the firm of Morris began its career, and was soon widely known for the beauty and interest of the work it produced.

Poetry became only one of many interests and Morris's verse lost its startling quality. Vivid, dramatic poems were replaced by long and leisurely stories in verse, rolled out with the same ease and smoothness as tapestry from his looms. His love of the Middle Ages remained constant. Jason is a hero from the Greek world, but Morris has told the story of his life and death, not as an ancient Greek would have shaped it, but as the mediæval story-teller would have told it.

Morris looked back to Chaucer and tried to tell his story as Chaucer might have told it; but it was not possible for any poet of his day to have remained untouched by the romantic poetry of the early nineteenth century, and we know that Morris had studied it. He loved Chaucer, but he loved Keats too. He arranges the parts of his tale as Chaucer might have done, though he had not his humorous spirit; and his words have a richness, fainter than Keats's, but more studied than Chaucer's. The characters in his poems are more dimly seen than Chaucer's. They are more romantic and more melancholy.

In 1870 Morris had completed a collection of tales in verse, which he called *The Earthly Paradise*. He had invented a setting for the poem by which he was able to include twenty-four tales, such as might have been known to the writers of mediæval romances. The finest of all the stories is *The Lovers of Gudrun*, and

Morris found the theme for this tale in the Icelandic literature in which he had long delighted. Other stories tell over again the stories of Greek mythology and English legends. The first few lines of the prologue show us the England Morris dreamed of—

“ Forget six counties overhung with smoke,
 Forget the snorting steam and piston stroke,
 Forget the spreading of the hideous town ;
 Think rather of the pack-horse on the down,
 And dream of London, small, and white, and clean,
 The clear Thames bordered by its gardens green.”

For ten years after *The Earthly Paradise* Morris went on with his many-sided work, designing and producing beautiful things, and writing prose and poetry. Towards the end of this time he began to be more and more aware of what he called “ the terrible gulf between riches and poverty,” between the wealthy manufacturer and the working man. Morris had always been rich enough to live in comfort, and he now realized something of the sordid ugliness in which many poor people were doomed to pass their whole lives. He felt that there must be something wrong in a government or society, which allowed one class to enjoy the utmost luxury, with no thought for those who were starved in body and soul.

Morris was not alone in his views. Many of the most thoughtful among the working classes were determined to make the world a better place for themselves and their children. They formed themselves into a league to carry out their purpose and were called Socialists. The Socialists demanded, among other things, a more equal division of the good things of life, and they

found many friends among artists and poets, and none was more whole-hearted than Morris.

There was no limit to his devotion. He sold his treasured books to help the funds of his new friends, the Socialists ; he wrote songs for them ; he lectured in halls and in the open air for them, and travelled as far as Scotland to preach the cause of Socialism and explain what it really meant.

To make its meaning still clearer to all he wrote a description of "England's green and pleasant land," as it might be in the future, if his dreams came true. In *News from Nowhere* we see this England, peopled by strong, comely men and women, no longer sweated in factories and workshops, for machinery has been destroyed. There are no slums, no poor people, and no rich ones ; no one has any property of his own and no one desires any ; money has no value. The men and women find their happiness in healthful exercise and the pleasant works they undertake and carry out together. *News from Nowhere* is a delightful story. You need not spend much time over the chapters in which Morris deals with what is called political science ; the description of the journey up the Thames and the riverside country that Morris loved is far more interesting. In *A Dream of John Ball*, which was written about the same time and with the same purpose, the setting of the story has a special charm. It is Essex as it was in Chaucer's time, and the teller of the story is made to look very like Chaucer himself. In this book you will read the speech of John Ball at the market-cross, and in it the famous praise of fellowship.

Morris ceased to be an active Socialist, but he never

lost his faith in art and its power to create happiness. He had written prose stories in his undergraduate days, and up to the last year of his life he continued to write romances. His prose romances are not in the least like modern novels. They are more like fairy tales, and are written in a deliberately simple style which makes them seem to belong to an earlier day. His characters are dimly drawn and make us think of the wan, unearthly folk, who look out at us from the pictures of Morris's lifelong friend, Burne-Jones. Indeed, there is much in common between the art of the two friends, and in this period, in general, there was a closer bond between poets and painters than there had been before in England.

One of the latest of Morris's industries was printing. He had the letters of the printing press cut to please his own ideal of printing, which was based, not on modern printing, but on some of the earliest books printed in England. Morris's press was set up in Kelmscott on the upper Thames, and from there he issued books as perfect in form as he could make them, enriched by pictures made for him by his artist friends. Some of these books were written by Morris himself, but some were books of an earlier date, and among them was a Chaucer, prepared with special devotion as a tribute from Morris to his master.

Morris died in 1896, and so our history of literature has reached almost to the twentieth century. Of the other poets of Morris's day one, Dante Gabriel Rossetti, had died before him, and the other, Algernon Swinburne, lived on till 1910.

Rossetti's poetry is far richer and deeper than *The Earthly Paradise*. His sonnets have a murmurous,

reverberating music, but you will not find them easy to understand. Rossetti, like his fellow countryman, Dante, had a stern and intense vision, and was absorbed in his own dreams. He was a painter as well as a poet, and he used both arts with equal ease to create a haunting and tragic kind of beauty. Two of his poems you will hardly fail to like, though they are not in the least alike—*The King's Tragedy*, a ballad poem, and *The Blessed Damozel*, one of the most famous poems of the century. Rossetti's sister, Christina, was a poetess and wrote a poem which all children know, *The Goblin Market*.

When you are older, you will find waiting for you the poetry of Swinburne with all its splendid music and all its changing moods. There are lyrics that are full of the weariness of spirit, and others that are full of enthusiasm for liberty, for Italy and her people. There are tragedies after the fashion of ancient Greece, and tragedies in which the heroes and heroines of later history move, and there are the long poems in which Swinburne, inspired by Malory, tells us once more the fates of Arthur's knights.

Matthew Arnold, whose *Forsaken Mermaid* is in many poetry books, has written other poems of a grave scholarly beauty which you will enjoy later, and from them you can turn to the verse of Thomas Hardy and the still more difficult poetry of Meredith. The novels of these two novelists, the greatest of their day, make difficult reading for all but grown-up people. You may perhaps like to read Hardy's *Trumpet Major*, but it would be a pity to spoil the pleasure you will get later by trying to read these novels, before your mind is ready for them.

One novelist, however, a man of great talent, wrote many of his books for boys and girls, though they have delighted older people too. He was Robert Louis Stevenson.

Stevenson was born in Edinburgh, and his parents had decided that he was to become a lawyer ; but he was determined to become a writer, and he devoted his energy to making himself master of a good prose style. Some writers, like Scott and Dickens, write swiftly ; their pens glide along with very little hesitation, and they rarely have to pause to seek for the words they need. Often they do very little revising of their work, and are content to let their work stand as it first took shape. Other writers go slowly and carefully, choosing their words with much deliberation, searching for the exact phrase that they want and rejecting others which seem to them less good. Not until they have criticized and corrected their own work do they allow it to be given to the world. This was Stevenson's way of composing. He tells us, in one of his essays, of the trouble he took to study words, and how he used to practise describing the things he saw in his everyday walks in the best possible words. He examined the prose of other authors and used to set himself exercises in imitating their style, and so at last he perfected his own style and became a master of prose.

He began by writing essays in which he recalled old memories of his boyhood, or described his wanderings with a donkey in the Cevennes. His first novel, *Treasure Island*, has become famous as one of the best tales of adventure ever written ; indeed, it is hard to think of a better one, unless you prefer *Kidnapped* or

The Master of Ballantrae. In these two novels, the scene is laid in Scotland, and in *Kidnapped*, the hero, making his way across Scotland, with a price on his head, has escapes so vividly told that we hold our breath in sympathy with him.

Stevenson wrote several historic novels and one strange story of modern life, *Dr. Jekyll and Mr. Hyde*, in which the hero has two different natures which struggle for the upper hand. He also wrote detective stories and a tale of modern adventure. His last novel, which promised to be his best, was left unfinished.

Soon after he had finished *Kidnapped*, his health, which had rarely been good, broke down, and he had to leave Scotland for the south. After trying many climates he settled far away from Europe, in one of the South Pacific Islands called Samoa. Here he spent the rest of his life in an island of tropical beauty, among natives who came to think of him as their best friend. His health was wretched, but he worked away at his writing as determined as ever to make literature.

Stevenson is a writer who takes his readers into his confidence and tells them his own thoughts and feelings, his doubts and beliefs. As we read his essays we learn what sort of man he was. The letters which he wrote to his friends, throughout his life, have been preserved and published for all to read, and they tell us even more about him. He was a man who had suffered and thought. He did not pretend to think that life was easy, but he believed in truth and justice and, above all, in courage. Many people find in his writings and in his life a message—to face the adventure of life with a high spirit and a good heart.

Stevenson was a poet, too. His *Child's Garden of Verses* was written for children before children's poetry was half as delightful as it has since become. He was an admirer of Burns, and wrote poems in the language and metre of Burns with gleams of Burns-like humour. He also wrote ballads, in long rolling lines, about the heroes of South Sea stories; and he has written in the old ballad metre the story of a feud between a Stewart and a Cameron which is very good to read.

Since Stevenson wrote and the twentieth century began, the stream of literature has flowed on. Poetry, novels, essays, plays, and all those forms of literature whose growth we have traced flourish, and are added yearly to the great procession. Men and women still give their best to literature to-day, as they have done in every age, and their readers find pleasure in their work. There is neither time nor space to write here of the honourable company of living writers, but three must be, at least, mentioned for the sake of what they have given to boys and girls—Rudyard Kipling, Walter de la Mare, and Sir James Barrie.

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